A MODERN CORSAIR

RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE

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d help the system in its course;
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pression, with its fearful sway,
drives electric-like away;
d if the Blood is found impure,
will effect a perfect cure.

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acts like some magician's charm
any time a dainty draught,
hich will dispel disease's shaft;
re priceless than the richest gold,
at ever did its wealth unfold;
ld all throughout our native land
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A
MODERN CORSAIR

A Story of the Levant

BY

RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE

AUTHOR OF

"MY OFFICIAL WIFE," "CHECKED THROUGH," "LOST COUNTESS FALKA," ETC.

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GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS, LIMITED

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A MODERN CORSAIR.

BOOK I.—When Greek Meets Greek.

CHAPTER I.

THE SECRET COMMITTEE OF LLOYDS.

It was the very sloppiest afternoon of a stormy March day, which brought together three sturdy Britons, closely gathered around the fire, in an anteroom of the chambers of Lloyds, in the Royal Exchange at London.

"I don't call to mind a worse day than this for many a long year," sullenly said Chairman Higginbotham, as he gazed at his fellow members of the Secret Committee, which had just been named.

They were now lingering until the crowd of underwriters, called together by the annual meeting of marine insurers for "ninety-four," should melt away into the dreary gloom wrapping that monster city, which has swamped old Londinium in its modern tide. One of the listeners looked up and gloomily nodded, as he vigorously wielded the poker, and then continued stirring up the dejectedly smoldering coals. "Rough weather at sea!" growled member Thomas Walden, with a presage of professional misfortune.

"Yes, it's a beastly day!" chimed in member Wilson Waddingham, turning away from the window, whence

he had gazed out upon a line of dripping umbrellas, spread four abreast. The wearied hansom horses slipped upon the inundated pavements, their drivers meanwhile hurling forth volleys of imprecations from under their streaming storm wraps. The gas blinked dull and yellowish in both street and room. Even the great open hall of Lloyds was shaded in a gloomy penumbra.

"I'll not venture home to-night! Stay in town!" ejaculated Waddingham, as he gazed out into the great rooms, now nearly deserted.

"Very good," answered John Higginbotham. "Then you and Walden can come up and dine with me, and then, we can talk this whole thing over. It's safer so. For I've been already warned that we must not meet here, nor even leave a single scrap of paper to betray us."

"What's up now? Something crooked again?" said Walden, as he angrily thrust the poker deep into the heart of the fire, and then gave it up as a bad job.

"The fact is," whispered Higginbotham, "Komanos and Company are at it again! Now, that's all I can tell you till we are safe at my house. I have been given full powers, and my secret instructions are only to be divulged to you. The Executive Committee are determined now to get at the truth of the matter, if it costs a hundred thousand pounds, that's all!"

The listeners had approached their chairman, and Walden muttered: "Those Levantines are the very devil's own—that's what they are!"

"I was told to name my associates," continued their chief, "and so I selected you, for I know that we can work well together."

"Delighted, I'm sure!" the juniors cried, and then the chief consulted his sturdy old Frodsham timer. "Let's see! Five now. I dine at seven, sharp. I've a few letters to write. Be on hand, sharp seven!"

With a nod, the others passed out in search of the assorted cloaks, mackintoshes, goloshes, ponderous umbrellas and respirators, which are the only human

armor 'gainst raw London fogs and driving British storms.

Solid, stocky men, rosy of face and of cheery mien, this confidential committee of the famous Lloyds was of the unpretentious type of the British merchant. Resolutely clinging to the Albert frock and the impervious British guinea hat, their sober exteriors hardly denoted men whose signatures were good on 'Change for hundreds of thousands of pounds. Good livers, trusty friends, true lovers, honest haters, sound and sweet at the core as Britain's solid apples, the three friends were all notable figures among the world's greatest underwriters.

In a few moments, Higginbotham saw his friends disappear into two dripping four wheelers, and trundle away to the West End, where the schemes of the city crystallize into the solid comfort of the British home—the hub of the European wheel.

"I wonder what the old Harry is up at Smyrna, now?" mused the committeeman, as he dropped his huge bulk into a chair by the window, and filled the pocket pipe, so dear to the Englishman. "There's no time to lose, if we would head them off. Let me see! This is the tenth. We could surely get our men out there by April first."

The old underwriter watched the tide of vehicles pouring along now westward, for your British merchant, stubbornly conservative, comes late and goes early. The blinding gusts of chill rain hid from view the faces of those cowering within the humble hansom or the stately carriage of the bank director.

"I may as well now wire to my man to run up here, at any rate. I suppose that they'll give me free hand, as usual!" cried Higginbotham, as he rang for a page, and then briskly sent off an imperative telegram, addressed "Captain Enos Drage, R. N., St. Aubrey's Villa, Lenox Road, Southsea."

"That will fetch the old campaigner in short order!" gleefully ruminated the writer. "He knows every corner of the footstool, and, I will wager, if Enos

Drage will agree to go out there, these fellows will find it's a case of Greek meeting Greek. He is a match for the best of them!"

In half an hour, Higginbotham locked up his desk with a resounding bang, which echoed through the great lonely rooms. His letters duly dispatched, the old merchant grasped his wraps and umbrella and sallied forth to meet his friends, five miles away, around the old mahogany, brought from the West Indies, when even a British fleet had to fight its way. The secret labors before them weighed gloomily upon him.

Standing alone in the main hall, Higginbotham became reminiscent. "Bless me!" he cried. "How this interest has grown since the few sea captains first gathered at Lloyds' dingy coffee rooms in Abchurch lane! Even in 'eighteen twenty-four,' the 'Royal Exchange' and 'London Assurance' were the only companies writing marine policies. To-day, Great Britain carries five-eighths of the cargoes of the world and insures three-quarters. Thousands of millions of pounds at risk annually And now every ounce of gold that moves in commerce passes, once a year, through London. We get a bit of it, every time, so we do!" he chuckled, with sturdy English pride.

And then the vexing subject of his secret committee labors returned. "There be land rats, and water rats," he growled, as he strode across the vast rooms, and gazed at a huge Mercator's Projection of the Waves, so boldly ruled by Britannia, and the land which only serves as a rim for good Queen Victoria's watery domain.

"We must block off these fellows' sly little game! At it again, are they? Well, we will see!" muttered the angry old man, as he strode along, brandishing his umbrella in indignation at those distant foes of the British underwriter, "Komanos and Company," of an unsavory Levantine renown. "We will see. Enos Drage is just the man to fight them!" was the English-

man's final decision, as he stumped down the slippery stairs.

The great rooms were deserted by the members, and the silence was unbroken save by a knot of porters, janitors and messengers, who had now gathered in their own waiting rooms to talk the day's doings over, aided by generous flagons of "bitter."

In the lonely "underwriters' room" there were still lingering a few modestly clad women, timidly poring over the "list of vessels arrived," happiness thrilling the heart of the "sailor's wife," anxious to know of the safety of Jack at sea!

And hard by the fatal "record of marine disasters" also hovered a trinity of pale-faced watchers, whose rusty black told that the worst was already known. And yet, with the fond heart of woman, they came day by day to scan the two enormous ledgers, in hopes that the log of some happy bark might yet tell of "boats picked up at sea," of the survivors of frail raft voyages, of the smoke signal on the lonely sand spit, and of the dead come to life again. For through the gray cloud of mystery which wraps the cruel waste of waters, the star of hope twinkles ever, though its rays be dimmed, and the straggling light reaches far into the longing heart of Nancy Lee.

Their feet raised no echoes on the floor daily trodden by merchants, ship-owners, brokers, underwriters, and grave-faced messengers.

Around the walls were clustered nautical instruments of quaint design—the giant self-registering anemometer and the anemoscope. In dusty corners, the standard barometers, solemnly swung there in haughty scorn of the clap trap aneroids, with their staring white baby faces and their unreliable hands. Filled with shining mercury, the old "reliables" were vowed to the service of that winged god, patron alike of thief, voyager and smug trader. Vast rolls of maps, and great atlases of yellowed charts, decorated wall and table.

The huge oaken chairs spread out their hospitable arms to clasp again the pompous merchant, with his

pendulous lip and crafty eye, as he listened to eager agent or bluff captain, bound in blue and brass, so redolent of oakum, tar and "marine stores."

Here, the "registered members of Lloyds" annually risk three hundreds of millions of dollars in chances on floating hulls and cargoes. The tidy little sum of sixty millions of the red sovereigns bearing the perennial smile of Victoria, by the grace of God Queen of the United Kingdom and Empress of India!

From this great room, thousand filaments of talking wires and cables reach out to the uttermost parts of the earth! To this room, for the austere records of "Lloyds' List," four thousand agents send telegrams, the mere cost of transmission rolling up to a king's yearly revenue. The nerve center of the marine trade of the world is here in this dingy hall.

In the vast adjoining reading rooms, the journals of the whole world, in fifty languages, are arranged, so that he who sails may read, as well as he who runs! The rays of Lloyds' all-seeing eye light up the earth from pole to pole, wherever man dares to venture, and its fiat can beggar Puck's girdle around the world to a mere slow performance.

The lightning flash of Lloyds' message follows the roll of the English drum around the earth, and its secret agents, its fast friends, its true servitors, are on every bark which proves Britannia's title to the empire of the waters on the face of the earth.

And under other flags, the honest sailor leans upon "Lloyds' List" and "Lloyds' Register of British and Foreign Shipping," to the dismay of all other mundane marine authorities. "Bureau Veritas," the "Austrian Lloyds," and all minor argus-eyed watchers "pale their ineffectual fires" before this maelstrom of power—money—men—records—and nautical science.

So grave, so austere, this self-governing body of Britons, that even the government bends to it, politicians eagerly woo its chilly regard, and the news journals kneel before the august throne of Lloyds! It is only filled by the shadowy presence of the ideal

British merchant, whose inviolable word is his sacred bond! For, here, pounds, shillings and pence are paid in righteous equity. Woe be to the erring who fight against its slow awakening wrath! There is no escape but death, or the perpetual effacement of the transported "lifer!"

If a bit of jollity ever lights up the somber shades of Lloyds, it gleams out in the "Captains' rooms," where ships are daily bartered and sold, where men for golden hire bind themselves to the issues of life and death, and where owners and masters can meet in friendship over a drop of spirits and a friendly Havana.

Here the brother returned from Plover Bay, by the icy Behring Straits, meets his cradle mate from the sweltering Red Sea,—here, the grizzled father running a Japanese merchant trader, sometimes rejoins his son, the slim cadet of the great P and O.

Men coming back from misty Magellan hobnob with those who have braved that "Cape of Storms," so queerly named "Good Hope," and the whaler from Baffin's Bay chats here with his chum, an R. N. man, who commands the yacht of H. R. H. the Prince of Wales. A diversity of pathways,—an equality of bravery and skill,—a common, breezy bluffness,—characterize all these Mother Carey's chickens. Men who in the wild storms of an Atlantic gale have often sent up the cheery signal, "We will stand by you!" when its signal lifted the chill of death from the failing hearts of the distressed! The heroes of peace, the brave and true.

And when the great doors clanged, and the last faltering woman had slipped away to the shades of the London docks,—far away, the cheery voice of John Higginbotham answered his butler, as the man in the blue and bluff livery said, "Gentlemen are already in the library, sir! Telegram just come, sir!"

Standing on the doorstep of his solidly splendid home, the Lloyds' director cried, "Good! By Jove! Drage will be up in the morning!" One of the twelve

annually named committeemen who handle the vast affairs of Lloyds, with power to make and unmake men and fortunes, John Higginbotham always left his outside cares at his front door.

Well on his way to the Lord Mayorship of London, he had already served on Lloyds' Managing Committee for twenty years by an almost universal suffrage. Sound and sweet-hearted as a British oak, the old man soberly bore his budding civic honors, and gave to all even handed justice,—to his friends the warm grip of the same honest hand which had crushed many a skulking rogue.

A member of the greatest London Livery Company, a director of the Bank of England, and a baronet in futuro!

He murmured, "Bright idea that of Van Lennep, to have the Austrian Lloyds' agent at Brindisi wire the warning to me. I suppose that he sent a man over there with it. That Smyrna gang is a deadly one. Poor agent Robinson reported 'drowned fishing.' Yes! But the ugly bullet hole in his back told another story! Beastly assassins! If any living man can trap them, old Enos Drage is the very chap! Fever proof, bullet proof, honest and true, he could take a liner into any port of the world without a pilot. But will he go? Can he go out at once?"

Higginbotham was now divested of all his damp envelopes, and was taking his sherry and bitters with his friends, before he finally recovered his composure.

"By Jove, he *must* go! It's only a lark for Enos, and I will make it an object. Unlimited backing—that's what the Twelve say." And the Twelve, for whom he was to do battle, were more powerful in their peaceful rule of maritime affairs, in these piping times of peace, than the haughty ermined Council who gathered the harvest of the Lion's Mouth, and ruled Venice, in Draconian cruelty, in the old days, when fair Venice, the bride of the Adriatic, ruled the very same Levant wherefrom the rosy Briton now swore to chase

his shadowy foes, "Komanos and Company," an undiscovered cabal of incognito villains.

It was two hours before the cheese and crackers, and the spirits and priceless cigars, signalized the close of the great merchant's solemn daily feeding. In his jovial hospitality, the host had deliberately exhausted the motions of the gastronomic manual of arms. Nothing but the sudden disappearance of the entire Royal family, or the flying away of the dome of St. Paul's, would have disturbed Higginbotham at his well-earned dinner.

He was a man of poise. "Now, gentlemen," the master said, briskly, "now, to business!" as he led the way to the library.

In the stately British home, this apartment, hallowed by the presence of great minds, gone on before, is sacred to all formal interviews, from marriage propositions to the opening of the will, where the greedy heirs cluster around with silent lips, hungry eyes and beating hearts.

"I am going to tell you a strange story, gentlemen," said the host. "I've heard already from the very man I want. He will be up here in the morning, from Southsea, and, if we agree on him, we can all turn the thing over for the last time to-morrow night. We have to trust to some good man, with the sole charge of a very important affair. I've sent for him, supposing that you would kindly back me up."

Both the well-dined colleagues nodded "as of course." "Who's your man?" briefly demanded Walden.

"Captain Enos Drage, Royal Navy, retired," said the chief, glaring around as if to defy the whole world's verdict.

"Fine old chap, have met him," interjected Waddingham. "No end of a cool, hardy old chap. Went out to China with Sherard Osborn, I think, in '62."

"Just so," cried Walden. "He commanded the 'Shun Lee,' an armed steamer, on the Yang-tse-Kiang.

They tell me that he ruled the river as far as Hangkow, Taepings or no Taepings! Game old boy!"

"Well, I'm glad you both like him! He's got a nasty bit of work cut out for him!" the host replied, as they then settled themselves cozily in the great Cordovan leather arm chairs.

"He's going to run up against a cruel, crafty and bloody gang out there at Smyrna. You know how they killed poor Robinson, the local agent of 'The Underwriters' and Agency Association of London,' out there, three years ago! Now, our man in charge there now, A. O. Van Lennep, knows that he can not fight these bloody chaps alone. So he has secretly sent on to me for help. All of the men in the Association are also members of Lloyds', and I am deep in the thing myself. We've got poor Robinson still to revenge, and my mind is made up to fight these fellows from here—but watch them, over there—by new men whom Komanos and Company don't know. I'm told to spare no expense, but to break up every swindling scheme now going on there, and to follow them to the bitter end. To expose them first is the needed action.

"Now, Drage was a dashing middy in the Crimean war, and he came home a lieutenant. He knows the Orient and Levant as few men do."

"What's up with 'Komanos and Company'? What's their little game?" demanded Walden.

"Oh! for that," briskly said the host, "nearly all the marine decalogue. Smuggling, false cargo work, insurance frauds, barratry, a bit of sneaking piracy, and veiled assassination! All these things can easily be traced to this elusive firm of 'Komanos and Company.' No one knows the personnel."

"Can't you locate their home nest?" wrathfully cried Walden.

"Not so easy a job," said the host. "There are four of their ships and cargoes on the black list of false wrecks in the last ten years. A fellow named Emile Bouclair turns up now as the manager at Smyrna. He has the procuration of 'Komanos and Company.' They

have been heard of heretofore at Alexandria, Port Said, Jaffa, Beyrout, Tripoli, Cyprus, Smyrna, Piraeus, Chio, Salonique, Rhodes, Candia, Constantinople, Trebizonde, Batoum, Odessa, and Trieste. Now, the 'Austrian Lloyds' have lately been swindled by this same daring gang, who seem also to be secretly backed by many of the Greek, Turkish and Egyptian merchants of the Levant, with the Armenians of all grades, some Jewish confederates, and, what is worse, they have a great hold upon all the Turkish authorities of every port where the red flag shows its white crescent. You know what Turkish officials are after?" he grinned.

"Backsheesh, I suppose!" growled Waddingham. "The man who goes out there surely takes his life in his hand. Your old dreadnaught, Enos Drage, would seem to be just the right man. What is the specific affair on the tapis, now? Some new swindle?"

"All I know is, that a giant fraud is under way. That I must at once come to the rescue of our eastern interests, and that I am to be given carte blanche. There must be no long chain of correspondence to betray us. Of course Her Majesty's ministers, consuls, and naval commanders in the Mediterranean and Levant will give the agent whom I send out all the secret assistance in their power."

Higginbotham drained his steaming toddy and said, "There you are! You can now see as far into the grindstone as I can!"

The juniors gazed at each other. "Look here!" said Walden. "You are really the very man to direct the whole affair. Your skipper will be up to-morrow. Go over the whole thing with him. We will all meet here to-morrow night and then hear your final orders. We both know that they only named three men, so that our signatures on these secret disbursements would save your estate any trouble in case of any accident. Of course one of us will always be on hand here in London to answer the secret agent's call.

"So go on and engage this Captain Drage, if you

can get him. We will ratify all you do. You can telegraph to-morrow in the 'Anglo-Indian's' own cipher, to inform the anxious Van Lennep. Say, 'Inspector coming!' He will then post your man thoroughly on his arrival. We will know of all your plans, observe your progress, and we can aid you here, so Lloyds' interests will be safe. Go in, governor, and cut out the whole cloth as you will."

Higginbotham was secretly pleased at the unanimity of his junior advisers.

"Then, as you say so, I'll go ahead to-morrow morning with old Enos!"

The two friends went out and braved the gusty storms of the streets, where the feeble yellow gaslight wildly flared in the tempest.

Only vice, crime or misery was abroad on London streets,—the ragged homeless crowded in dripping areaway and gusty alley,—and yet the pleasure seekers of society gaily breasted the storm in their splendid equipages, glad to escape the deathly chill of the languorous British home.

Long after the juniors had "shunted their moral responsibilities" off on to the broad shoulders of their host, the old man sat there, alone, gazing into his fire.

He saw there visions of derelict boats, storm driven, of rich cargoes foully submerged by villain sailors, of missing ships masquerading in the antipodes, under changed color, rig, private marks, with false papers and stolen names. All the dangers which attack the insured hull and cargo hovered around the old underwriter as a financial nightmare.

"I wonder," he said, as he rang for his butler to bring his bedroom candle and "night cap," "I wonder if 'Komanos and Company' can match that Yankee skipper whom we nailed out in Australia! That gay mariner ran away with the ship and stole three cargoes! He changed her rig four times, illegally used the Guatemalan, Hawaiian, and Japanese flag, borrowed money twice on 'bottomry bond,' unblushingly sold

hull and cargo at Melbourne, pouched his money, and was only given away at last, by a little lark with a woman."

The old man slowly stumped off to bed. "The Yankee only robbed," he muttered as he climbed the stairs, "but 'Komanos and Company' have always left a bloody trail. Thugs as well as thieves!" and vainly his wandering thoughts that night tried to resolve the mystery always clinging to the smooth faced Frenchman, Emile Bouclair, whose luxurious apartments were the scene, this very night, of a gay little supper, a deux, in the Grand Hotel Huck at Smyrna.

For the battle of wits was on, and "Komanos and Company" were gleeful.

London was just a bit less disagreeable when John Higginbotham descended the next morning into the cosy breakfast room. In the absence of his family at their Kentish country seat, the table was set for two only.

There was nothing unusual in the snowy cloth, the brightest of all silver services, variously and hideously hall marked, the toast racks, egg cups, marmalade jars, and all the paraphernalia of that English breakfast which is a part of the unwritten Constitution. The great Persian cat blinked at the red Irish setter, affectionately following the master in.

The vast house was silent save for the flitting about of the neat house maids and the solemn tread of the grave-faced servants. Huge silent drawing-rooms were piled with all the barbaric spoil of either Ind, the past tribute of grateful captains. An indefinable odor of Canton, a waft of Cairo, a fragrance of Borneo spices, and South Sea incense groves, still clung to the sober atmosphere of the Briton's home.

As Higginbotham entered, a brisk voice challenged him from behind a particularly damp copy of the "Times."

"Hello, old chap, what's up?" cried the visitor.

As the paper was tossed on a lounge, the alert form of Captain Enos Drage, R. N., displayed his well-cut

tweeds, and he nodded, in answer to the underwriter's cheery morning greeting.

The men were seated at table before the captain's eager curiosity was satisfied. The naval man's spare form was still of athletic mould, his high domed pointed head yet bore a fair wreath of brown hair, and a struggling whisker covered his heavy boned jaws. There was the very snap of steel springs in his firm white fingers. The broad shining forehead was lit up with the wonderful frosty gray blue eyes, which could flash on occasion with the glint of steel. The wholesome tan of forty years at sea hid all the evidences of Enos Drage's sixty-eight years. In the hallway reposed his mackintosh, stout umbrella and horse-hide traveling bag, which were old campaigners of distinction. And the north countryman's motto, "Ready, aye, ready!" seemed to be expressed in the lines of the firm lips surmounting his carven chin.

When Captain Enos Drage, R. N., sported the uniform of his rank, the Sebastopol medal on his breast vied in honor there with the Burmese, Chinese, India mutiny, and the easily won Egyptian. When Enos Drage heard the echoes of the eighty-ton guns die away at Alexandria, he at last hung up his well-notched cutlass with a grim satisfaction.

On this particular morning it ornamented the wall of his library at St. Aubrey's Villa, Lenox Road, Southsea. "Old Salamander," fondly so-called, bore the marks of bullet, Ashantee knife, and Burmese spear, and yet, sound in hull and rigging, he bowsed along over life's uncertain sea, saved by his hard head, and guided by a nose which would have delighted that great Corsican, who once cried, "Give me men with plenty of nose."

Crunching his toast, swallowing his soda, and sipping his dish of tea, Enos Drage held his wondering soul in well disciplined check.

But, when his bit of fish and eggs had vanished, he said, "What's up, John? Another sunken steamer to raise? Another fly-away Yankee to lariat? Any

more fishing for a couple of thousand tons of water pipes in the frozen Gulf of Finland? You never want me unless you are in trouble!"

Higginbotham's face grew grave. "Come in here, Enos!" he said, leading the way to the library. They threaded the solemn splendors of the main hall. Drage lit his manilla when the host had stuffed his pipe.

"Enos, I never knew you to go back on anything," he began.

"Only the Chinese stink-pots," cautiously hedged the naval captain.

The underwriter laughed at the one timidity of a man who had faced the cross-fire of a hundred and fifty sixty-four pounders, at Sebastopol, in a cockboat of a naval tug, leading Her Majesty's fleet into action. "All right, I admit the stink-pots, but, nothing else!"

Drage's steady eyes glared in a mute assent.

"Somebody has got to go out to Smyrna and face a gang of infernal cut-throats and swindlers! They're a beastly lot, this 'Komanos and Company!' Can you go out there?"

"When?" sharply said Drage.

"Right away!" sententiously cried the host.

"On one condition," rasped out Drage, with the bark of a playful wolf.

"And that is?" interrupted Higginbotham.

"That I deal with no one but you, and that I have my own way in all things!" the veteran calmly replied.

"Oh! come now!" soberly said the host. "Lloyds has given me a good secret committee—Walden and Waddingham are the other two. They will come up here to-night. Of course you'll have your own way. It's a stiff bit of work!"

"How long will it take?" queried the captain.

"Say six months to a year. I have carte blanche as to money. You shall have your own terms—fix your own fees, and all that. Only these two men must know of your mission. It is a profound secret to all but the Executive Committee of Lloyds.

"Now, that's something like it. I don't care to be

hampered by every old busybody who has a thousand pounds to stick on a policy," grinned Captain Drage, showing a double row of splendid white teeth.

"Tell me the main pointers. I must have time to think it all over."

In half an hour, Captain Enos raised his head. "Can I have all your confidential inspection reports sent up to your own room for me to study this thing over?" he demanded.

"Anything you want in the world. But I must telegraph to Smyrna this morning. Now, what's your answer?"

Higginbotham was studying the face of the sturdy old man, now as stern as any stone idol.

"They're a bad lot out there, these Levantines. I know the gang," growled Enos. "Well, give me a week to get ready, with full power. I'll go out. I will send a man off there to-morrow night to prospect. You send your telegram along now. Yes, I'll go!"

"By Jove! I'm awfully relieved, Enos!" cried the host. "Will you go down in my carriage?"

"Go ahead and send your telegrams! Get the papers out! I'll send a couple of dispatches down to Southsea, and then follow you down in a hansom."

The two men clasped hands silently after the fashion of Englishmen, and Enos Drage was now bound for good, to "John Company."

When the captain's second manila was finished, John Higginbotham was half-way down to where the black dome of St. Paul's hung with its whitened projections over the congested amphitheater where London's millions turn over hundreds of millions in gold, under the shadows of the grim Tower, rising, there by the leaden river, with its forests of masts, its gloomy warehouse crypts, and its interminable docks.

Drage had thought it all over quietly. "Yes, I'll go out to Malta, and first send the boy on there. Old Jack may come in also to lend a hand."

Rapidly penning a telegram, he called the butler. "Send that right off, Soames. There's a good fellow.

The shilling is for Her Majesty. You can keep the half crown for yourself."

And the delighted butler carefully spelled out these words, as he hastened away to the postoffice:

"Howard Vinton,

"St. Aubrey's Villa, Lenox Road, Southsea:

"Get ready to start for Smyrna at once. Find Jack Masterson. Down to-morrow night. Drage."

The old captain chuckled as he carefully wound up his pocket chronometer. "That will find him, surely. He's always hanging around the house with Lily. I wonder will he want to go? He's a good lad!"

Before Captain Drage had covered a dozen blocks in his hansom, he reflected that everyone around him always did exactly what he told them to, and so the unconscious old tyrant smiled as he was trundled along.

"Of course the boy will go! He's a game lad, and old Jack can watch over him a bit."

He became pensive, as he for a moment reflected upon the consternation which this summons would cause in the gentle breast of blue-eyed, golden-haired Lily Arnot.

"I can make it all up to them—later!" he mused, as he jogged along, to busy himself the livelong day in the study of the mass of papers now awaiting him at Lloyds.

There were four men gathered that evening in the library at Higginbotham's when Enos Drage gave his views upon the quest in hand.

"With your unlimited credentials I shall have all the power I want, gentlemen," remarked Enos, "and so I will not trouble the 'Austrian Lloyds' at Trieste, unless I need to use their wires, ciphers and perhaps their help in some juncture. You see, cute old Baron Bruck founded that very concern in 1833, to draw all the Eastern Mediterranean commerce into Austrian hands at Trieste. Their apparent friendship is only a real hostility to us, and even the 'Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco' works openly against us. Their three sec-

tions—insurance, steamship, and scientific—are all opposed to British interests. Their subsidiary journals are inimical to us also. Now, as to pure insurance interests, their men, near at hand, naturally choose the best risks, and then push the doubtful ones on us, as they are far nearer the field. If 'Komanos and Company' have really some power with the Turkish officials, they can favor the Austrian Lloyds and so, gain their quiescent neutrality.

"Now, I see from my study of to-day, that 'The Underwriters' Association of London' has been always mulcted in three times the sum paid by the Greek company, 'La Nationale,' of Athens, and the 'Riuone Adriatica,' of Trieste. All these people have agencies at Smyrna. There 'Komanos' policies have been in the first instance taken out by Greek, Turkish, Austrian and Levantine merchants, as well as some smaller French and German houses.

"The risks of the other foreign companies have been very safe, while you have been steadily heavy losers, and all the policies finally seem to wind up in the hands of 'Komanos and Company.' This proves that they are all in a hidden bond of friendship, and pull in the profits to themselves, pushing all the losses your way! Now, this buying of an enormous old tramp steamer at Trieste, patching her up for a voyage, and borrowing money on a bottomry bond on her, shows that they are getting ready for a big stroke. I'll have this young American out there before the ship is at Smyrna, and Jack Masterson, my old engineer on the 'Shun Lee,' and see her whole machinery, before the load is aboard."

"I'm a bit shy of Americans," said Walden, doubtfully.

Drage laughed heartily. "He's all right, this chap! I met him at the bombardment of Alexandria. He has a good bit of money of his own, and he went up to Cairo with the troops of the Tel el Kébir campaign.

"He knew Forbes, and McGahan, and Baker, Bur-

naby, and all these chaps. He's been around the Isle of Wight this season watching the Vigilant and the Britannia races. He knows the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Danube, and can easily play off the 'New York Herald correspondent.' Nobody will dare to touch him. There's the Armenian troubles, you know. And so he's got to dig into the citadel of this chap Emile Bouclair, while Jack Masterson watches the doubtful boat. Besides, Howard Vinton has a growing 'English interest' down at Southsea, which I will unmask at the right time. So you can get my credentials all ready. This dispatch to-day about the purchase of the big ship at Trieste shows there is no time to lose. We must be quickly on the ground. We must let them get their winning hand ready, but they must play it under our eyes."

"That's so!" growled Higginbotham, "and then go in and break them up! Chase them to the North Pole, but show them up. If any Turkish officials are in the frauds, we will have Her Majesty's Government behind us."

In half an hour the last secret instructions were given and received, and the quartette all adjourned to the supper-room.

"Remember," said the two juniors, "we only stand behind Higginbotham. All your reports and business goes to him direct. When do you leave?"

"As soon as I have started my men, I'll come back and then take the first steamer to Malta. You can get your letters to the consul at Smyrna and to Van Lennep ready. Full power, you know. Also, the secret letter to the British ambassador at Constantinople. For I'll only trust to the Union Jack! I'm off for home in the first morning train."

It was only after urging, when the punch had loosened all the listeners' tongues, that Enos Drage told them the story of his Chinese wanderings under Gordon and Sherard Osborn.

The old captain sat with his cheroot poised, and his Harvey's club soda before him, as he oracularly re-

marked: "All these Orientals, Asiatics and Levantines are the same—alike, cold, cruel, tricky, and bloodthirsty! Even the Japanese politeness is but a veneer—wait till the 'little brown man' shows his true colors in the next great war! All of them will bear watching to-day just as well as in the time when Ward, Burgevine and Gordon fought the bloody Taepings.

"I don't fancy that 'Komanos and Company' can get around me, after my watchful days on the 'Shun Lee'! The years from 'sixty-two' to 'sixty-four' taught me what all the dark-skinned races are. I learned an early lesson in the India mutiny. I saw later the horrors of Soochow, and I had the delightful pleasure of shelling the unfaithful Chinese at Hankow, in 'sixty-six.' I give no faith or credence to any of them—these dark-skinned scoundrels—after seeing my brother Zachary wager his life upon it and lose!

"Now, when I face 'Komanos and Company' I face them with the eye of a man who trusts no dark-skinned blood.

"Poor Zachary!" sighed old Captain Drage. "He had escaped the Nanking massacre, been wounded and broken down in our interminable fights on the Yellow River and the Yang-tse-Kiang. I wanted him to go home to his wife and his only daughter at Portsmouth, or else to stay with me on the 'Shun Lee.'

"For, I had a splendid steamer, with powerful engines, and a fine mixed crew of Lascars, Manila men, faithful Chinese, and eleven dare-devil Europeans as under officers. We had two hundred stand of the best Enfields, with revolvers and good tomahawks, and she carried a battery of twelve splendid brass guns, with a good four-inch rifle at bow and stern. For junk attacks and stink-pot work, we always had our boiling water hoses ready, four in all.

"Now, when I came in to Shanghai, after clearing the river, to refit with ammunition and unload a cargo of wounded men and refugees, I learned that poor Zachary had been sent off on a secret quest to remove a half million dollars in silver bars which had been buried

some time before by the Mandarins in an old ruined temple near the head of Hanchow Bay. He had taken the fastest lorcha in Shanghai, and forty Chinese men, picked out by the compradores of the richest firms.

"Poor Zachary! He was always a dare-devil, and so, he trusted to the faithful Chinese. Four tried and true Europeans were with him.

"I was sorely wounded by a copper gingal ball, and yet, when I found that the lorcha 'Emerald' had been missing for three weeks, I obtained permission to go out, and I coasted slowly down, examining every bay and headland as far as the location where the treasure had been concealed. A Mandarin who knew the spot accompanied us.

"My heart sank, when on landing a boat party, we found that the enormous hidden deposit had been carefully removed. Two hundred and fifty huge bars of two thousand dollars each, in all.

"And then the oily Mandarin raised his eyebrows to me and sneeringly asked, 'Where is your brother?' I could have killed him, but I only put the ship about in search, taking a wider range out to sea.

"At the dawn of the first day, on our way back, an old Scotch quartermaster roused me, crying out: 'Abandoned lorcha ahead, sir, drifting, a league away.'

"I was on my feet in a moment, and soon three armed boats, with forty stanch men, were eagerly pulling for the drifting lorcha.

"I kept the 'Shun Lee' standing on at half speed, with all the brass guns manned and ready for action.

"My first lieutenant soon came pulling back to the steamer in his barge, and led me down into the cabin. 'Captain,' said he, as his teeth chattered, 'I don't dare to tell you! Don't you go on board! They're all there. Dead! The five white men! Those yellow devils have turned on them! The lorcha is gutted! The rigging is useless! She has probably drifted down past Great Saddle Island!'

"I had no useless tears then for my dead brother, for I saw through the whole plot! The treacherous scoun-

drels had tried to make it appear to be the work of pirates, and the stolen half million was hidden somewhere. The price of my dead brother's honor. Why had they not scuttled or burned the lorcha?

"I seemed to hear Zachary's voice whispering and crying for vengeance.

"'Take the vessel's command!' said I. 'Run up and get a tow line out! Let all the dead be decently disposed. The carpenter has plenty of camphor wood chests.'

"'How far off is this same island?' 'Dead ahead, and just visible,' said my First. 'Stand off and on then till 4 o'clock,' I cried, 'and we will run in there at daybreak, and search the island! Let not a single light be shown!'"

Old Enos Drage rose and eagerly paced the floor.

"By 4 o'clock I was roused up by my first officer. 'All ready, sir. I've now got some sails and a half dozen men aboard of her! The men are all having their breakfast.'

"'Full speed then for the island!' I cried. 'We'll land one hundred men and five boats. Take forty musket rounds, with revolvers and cutlasses!' The day was just breaking as we swiftly ran into the little cove, under the sink of the saddle of the two hills.

"The surgeon and second engineer were left on the 'Shun Lee,' with her remaining men at the double-shotted brass guns, and we descended upon the nest. Not a sound but the plash of the oars was heard as our boats swept into the cove. I was the first man to leap ashore!

"The boats were quickly moored under cover of the ship's guns, with two men left in each. And then our double skirmish line swept up the island. Not a living thing was found in the pepper scrub and low bushes save a few wild hogs. It was near noon when, suddenly, Jack Masterson grasped my arm.

"'D——n my eyes! There's smoke coming out of that hill top!' Sure enough! There was a dim column of blue smoke filtering out from the broken

rocks. 'We've got 'em, Cap'n!' said Jack, his eyes ablaze. 'There's a cave there!'

"In half an hour we found the hidden entrance. But, only one man could crawl in at a time!

"While the men were running around hunting for dry grass, and a double firing party was being told off to flank the entrance, Jack was away like a flash to the 'Shun Lee' in the cutter. He cried on his return, 'They've barricaded the entrance well! Here are a half dozen stink pots.'

"And then, one by one, they were lit and thrown far into the narrow opening. With cocked Enfields my eager men now waited!

"There was the sound of smothered cries at last, and then, the barricade was burst by a crazed mob. Knife and spear in hand, the half-suffocated pirate brutes came dashing out. The ring of the Enfields, the thud of the bayonet and the revolver crack was their only welcome.

"At night, forty-eight pigtails lay there stark and stiff in a line. There were the 'faithful ones' who had turned!

"It took us a whole day to clean the cave of the stink pots' poisonous gases. And then we found, beside, five Chinese smothered inside the cave and the whole of the stolen treasure. I wondered at finding all of poor Zachary's clothes and arms, as well as all the effects of the others. They must have been all drugged and killed while they slept.

"When I got back to Shanghai my first was in command, and I was in the hospital four months with a brain fever.

"It was a chattering fool who told me that my poor brother Zach and his four petty officers were all found spiked down naked to the deck, with their throats cut!

"The same ship that took his poor body home to rest in English soil carried a bill of exchange for twenty thousand pounds. The hypocritical Mandarins gave me that for saving the treasure. They

paid another fifth, as salvage to the crew of the 'Shun Lee.'

"And that very fund—the price of poor Zach's blood—is now all that his grandchild has! For, when Major Arnot and his wife died of cholera out in India, poor Zach's daughter could only turn to this old hulk to watch over their infant Lily. If 'Komanos and Company' can fool a man who has spent a dozen years tussling with these Chinese pirates and the sly Malay rogues, they will have to keep their weather eye out."

And so, when the old mariner waved his bed candle in a "good night," the three underwriters nodded to each other.

"Old 'Shun Lee' Drage will be the very man. His bronzed old figurehead shows the sailor every inch!"

"Yes, and he has the nose of a ferret. Peculiar old chap. Undaunted, untiring, and as cool as an iceberg. Let us give him a free hand, for we now send him to fight an unknown enemy in a faraway land, and at their own chosen game."

So saying, John Higginbotham toasted the vanished mariner, who was himself a stern teetotaler, a nautical wonder.

And then the other members of the secret committee of Lloyds sought their homes in a profound confidence in their weather-beaten old champion.

CHAPTER II.

THE LILY OF SOUTHSEA.

The secret committee were all happy men as they entered the Royal Exchange next morning, under the shadows of the eight great columns. They had shuffled off their annoying burden upon the shoulders of grim old "Shun Lee" Drage!

The two juniors, in some indefinable way, felt that

sturdy John Higginbotham and the battered old Captain, would finally do up Komanos and Company "to the queen's taste"!

"It's all right now," said Walden to Waddingham. "Uncle John has telegraphed to Van Lennep, and there is Maurice Fitzgerald, our Vice Consul General at Smyrna, a splendid fellow! There's always two or three war vessels of the Christian nations kept within hail by the secret pact! And old 'Shun Lee' has his seven league boots on now!" They passed on to their daily mingling with the swarm of human ants rolling over the nimble British Sovereign, whose golden face never grows old!

It was true that the veteran who had served his ringing brass shell guns under the Dragon flag, was already bowling back to Southsea.

Comfortably ensconced, en second, he pulled away at his manila, and with his domed head cocked awry, pondered upon the "near future." He knew that the old mackintosh and umbrella—his plenary authority from Lloyds—and his well-stored cranium were all ready for the voyage! Higginbotham's last word to report to Lloyds' agent at Portsmouth for any later news and for cipher communication put his mind at ease.

"I'll just consign Howard Vinton and Jack Masterson to Van Lennep, at Smyrna," he mused, as the train slid easily along down through Surrey and Hampshire, to the green Solent.

"They must be off tonight and run through the whole trip without a stop! Vinton can take the Oriental Express,—see our Minister at Constantinople,—and then round up at the 'Grand Hotel Huck.' Jack Masterson can run direct down to Trieste,—catch an Austrian Lloyds' steamer,—and show up at the 'Scots Arms,' with mine host 'Sandy McPherson' at Smyrna! He will find out all about this big tramp steamer picked up by these sharpers! If he's the Jack I've always found him, he'll get into her engine room or stoke hole, and then pipe the enemy off. Yes; all will go smoothly. But I must get the boy off tonight. I'll warrant he's at the house now, waiting for me!"

In which sage conclusion, Captain Enos Drage was only partly correct. The storm which had howled over Middlesex had driven Mr. Howard Vinton into the very cosiest home in Hampshire, but the nervous, impulsive American was not waiting for "Uncle Enos!"

He was only studying a little color effect,—the peachy bloom of Lily Arnot's cheek,—the sparkling blue of her frank eyes,—and the twisted gold of her silken hair. That gold which shines only as Nature's dowry of the English maid, par excellence.

The wild wind was tumbling the green billows around in the Solent and a line of England's huge battleships sullenly swung at Spithead, their black sides gleaming out in England's defiant challenge to her sleepless foes.

Storm signals were flying in Spithead harbor and the chilly winds shrilled from the hostile shores of France!

But, in Howard Vinton's warm lover heart, the "blue peter" signal of departure was already hoisted, and his thoughts were as wistfully tender as the dashing Tommy Atkins when "The girl I left behind me" rings out!

"Paraded for foreign service, that's the tip!" mused Vinton, as he awaited the very neatest of maids, whose mute signal brought Miss Lily Arnot to her coign of vantage behind the tea urn!

Sacred privilege of the holy British matron! Lineal glory of the family line! The manipulation of the very pride of the British home, the gleaming silver tea urn! For, none but those "to the manner born" may usurp the function of the acknowledged woman who rules the household under cover of that sacred implement.

A Spanish woman's fan,—a French woman's expressive eyes,—an Austrian's witching smile,—an Italian's inimitable grace of gesture,—the German fraulein's sigh, aid their empire,—the American girl's facile repartee conquers all,—but, behind the awful tea

urn, the English woman defies a social world in arms, and then annihilates her foes with her "baby stare"!

"It all seems so strange, Howard!" said Miss Lily. "I was looking forward to our rides,—our lawn tennis,—the Royal Yacht Squadron races,—and presto!—both you and Uncle Enos are off like a shot for Smyrna!"

And then the shadow of gloom settled over Vinton's bright face. It was a friendly waft of the Recording Angel's wing that smothered the rebellious ejaculation: "Oh! D——n Smyrna!"

The very sweetest girl in Southsea had called up all the delights of the coming summer! "I don't know what bee is buzzing in Uncle Enos' bonnet!" the young American sadly murmured. "He is free to come and go! He has a road passport in perpetuity, one of the 'Kinder der welt'! But—Smyrna is beastly hot in summer! Even tough old Jack Masterson, who laughs at the Red Sea, doesn't relish this trip! Is he here?"

There was a faint blush on Lily Arnot's fair cheek, as she laughed. "He is downstairs saying Good Bye to Mary already! He is a bit downhearted, but he will go all the same! He knows that Uncle Enos' will is law!"

"Do you think so, Lily?" said the "correspondent." "You must remember, Howard, Captain Drage has been all the parent I have ever known!" A bit of very tender interlude was here cut short by the entrance of Miss Lavinia Drage.

This Spartan spinster greeted Howard Vinton with a smile of intelligent neutrality, and then coldly allowed her grandniece to peck at her withered cheek with a duty kiss.

The days of backboard and Magnall's questions,—the era of "L. E. L." and "the Passion Flower Annual," were wafted back by the advent of this stern gentlewoman.

Around the walls of the room were hung several neat bits of water color, the trophies of her salad days.

And now, Miss Lavinia gazed with a sigh at those

tell-tale initials on the bristol board "L. D. 1845."—"As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form," she defied the ravages of Time like the Coliseum,—her maiden zone still unbound,—confined her still slender shape!

No one had dared to trifle with the records of her age, and the astute single lady guarded in secret the Family Bible with a Draconian severity. But she always called the aging Enos Drage her junior, and she still fondly regarded the wedge-headed old veteran as a truant sailor boy!

She had never seemed to notice the narrow silver fringe upon his gleaming crimson occiput growing thinner with every year!

In all the past summer Miss Lavinia had alertly watched the young American! His literary trips to London,—his dashes to the Continent,—his runs to Newmarket,—his following of yacht fleet and current notable events,—had all ended in a final return to Southsea!

"Sunny Southsea," so fondly termed by the local inhabitants who laughed to scorn the elusive charms of Penzance and the feeble glories of St. Heliers!

Here, in the heart of a people devoted to the Crown, the last maiden flower of the Drages had slowly budded, bloomed, and was now withering in the sere and yellow! She had never focused her indomitable gaze upon "the tyrant man!"

There was a dim tradition that when Lieutenant Rodgers Conyers of H. M. S. "Eurydice" was speared in Burmah in 1854, a long silken lock of her bright hair was buried in the trench with that same gallant officer!

Be it as it may,—her gentle reserve was unbroken, and the fragrant memory of the gallant Conyers lingered in the emptiness of her sealed heart's chamber, like the perfume of attar of roses, clinging to the gilded crystal, cast away for many a year!

A walking directory of the Army and Navy List, an authority upon the Civil Service, and a scrupulous observer of ceremonial social forms was Miss Lavinia!

The whole region seemed to be consecrated to the Sovereign, and the meteor flag of England had always "burned terrific" before her eyes on trim frigate, snaky torpedo boat, pirate-looking cruiser and lumbering battleship!

The squatty mail-clad revolving forts,—the antique masonry works,—the ugly new mud batteries,—and the vast barracks, all were dedicated to the Army or Navy!

And in the society of Admirals,—Commodores,—Generals and Colonels, dashing Adjutants and even trim "middies," Miss Lavinia became an authority upon all fleet and garrison matters! In good works she was conspicuous, and the gentle tribute of her guinea flowed into the coffers of every "society" which extracts stray sovereigns from a people who always give liberally, heartily and quietly. Miss Lavinia conscientiously read the Court Circular, and she enjoyed the distant glimpse of the Royal Ensign waving over Osborne House!

She knew every sounding of the Solent and Southampton water; she could have walked blindfolded from St. Helens and Ryde to Cowes,—Yarmouth,—Brixton, and Bambridge!

The roses had bloomed and withered many a year since she had exhausted the attractions of the twenty one day's trips from Southsea! A rare old girl of a golden heart!

Her whole family had been devoted to the service of the Crown,—the Army and Navy. India and the Colonies had eaten up the "fighting Drages," who could not bear to live at home in peace in the snug little island!

The women had all married in the same spirit, and so the "service" blood had been bred, in and in!—So Miss Lavinia felt that she, too, was serving the flag in her silent faithfulness to the memory of the man dead out there in Burmah, whose proud simple epitaph was "Killed in action,"—the mute record of the willing payment with his heart's blood of the Queen's Shilling!

It had been the same when the rash Zachary Drage had been so foully done to death in China, for he was "on leave," with Sherard Osborn's men, when he died on the lorcha "Emerald"! When Enos Drage returned at last to hang up his dented sword at Southsea, he, too, was received with open arms for his battered shape,—his scapes and scars attested the olden Drage loyalty!

There was a softening in the adamantine heart of the spinster when young Major Henry Arnot and his girl-wife, Mary Drage, died together of cholera at Allahabad in "seventy-seven"! Zachary Drage's sweet girl-wife had not lived to enjoy long the income of the grateful mandarins' present!

Mary Drage had been only too happy in her love dream with dashing Harry Arnot, who had boldly galloped a light battery through the Sepoy's flaming ranks as a Lieutenant in mutiny days! The dark-skinned Amma, who brought white-faced baby Lily Arnot home, wondered at the austere face of the bony "Mem Sahib."

But, the docile Hindoo understood the meaning of the opened arms that clasped Mary Arnot's baby to a childless breast!

The two women got on well together, though speech was denied them, for unselfish love has a language all its own! And long after the fragile Amma had duly succumbed to the fogs and chills of "Sunny Southsea," even in these days of Harold Vinton,—the little voyager from India had remained "The Child"!

Miss Lavinia, who scorned the weakness of eye-glasses,—gazed on this particular morning at "The Child" with a woman's intuition that something was going to happen! For, "The Child" had a decided efflorescence of blue true-lover's knot at her neck,—a "brighter iris" than usual glowed upon her damask cheek, and the slender fingers trembled over the egg-shell china cups!

"They have been talking it over!" grimly decided Miss Lavinia. She was not averse to the society of

Howard Vinton, but he was a "Yankee" from that shadowy realm—"the States,"—by which name Englishmen define our own Columbia!

"I must speak to Enos! This must not go on too far!" mused Miss Lavinia, turning her calm blue eyes upon the audacious stranger whose errant footsteps always returned to the immediate vicinity of "The Child."

But, the dark-haired young American was soberly gazing at that trinity of old swords on the wall,—the cutlasses of the dead Zachary, the blade of the much alive Enos, and the artillery saber of the late Major Henry Arnot, V C.

"Have you heard from your uncle, Lily?" said the courteous chaperon.

"Yes, Auntie," the demure maiden replied. "Uncle Enos will be here at midday! Mr. Vinton and old Jack, too, are waiting for him. They are all going away tonight,—to Smyrna!"

The girl's voice ended in a shadowy sob, and yet she bravely gulped her dish of tea, after the fashion of the Drages!

"Ah!" significantly said the spinster. She knew of these mysterious quests which led Enos Drage around the world! His restless spirit still yearned for action! Wherever a castaway ship called for its salvage, or a sunken cargo awaited the energetic reclaimer,—where financial broil,—knotty problem,—or tangled insurance affairs, demanded a cool head and honest heart,—Enos Drage was sent out as the very man to fill the gap!

An expert upon values,—a marvelously patient adjuster,—a fearless advocate,—the old retired officer was the secret servant of the Lloyds! And, as Miss Lavinia religiously hoarded up the excess of her private income for "The Child,"—so old Enos Drage merrily worked to the end that his "personal estate" might be noted in "The Times," and later, fence the lamb of his heart from the cold winds of adversity!

"Some business trip,—as usual," remarked Miss

Lavinia. "I will now go out for my constitutional so as to be here and help Enos with his packing!"

The old lady marched away, with a shrewd glance in the direction of Howard Vinton. That young man had risen, and was studying the collection of hideous bronzes,—carven tusks,—Benares brass,—Japanese crystal,—nautilus shells,—heroically useless cabinets, all the aftermath of the many service voyages of the wandering Drages!

In the substantial four-story stone Southsea mansion there was an unrivaled collection of armor,—swords and daggers,—Turkish gear,—Southsea curios,—quaint broideries—and a very practically selected "loot," which spoke of "mutiny days," as well as the deeds of the "Ever Victorious Army" and "Her Majesty's Forces" in China.

Captain Enos Drage had been for long years vainly besieged by the experts of Wardour street to market these accumulated treasures. The sly old sailor knew of their increasing value!

He loved to pore over them with memories of the days when under the fire of gingals,—and facing spear and musket,—these trophies had fallen to the share of a fighting family! Even that vigorous Hebrew "Zacharias of Southsea," failed to gather in these treasures to swell his collection upon the marine parade!

The "severe simplicity" of Miss Lavinia's departure told the young American rover that there was no time to lose! He knew that the spinster was faintly agnostic as to all American character! She regarded the American girls who were now bowling down both Duke and Earl as mere piratical interlopers! Fair to view—and hollow at heart!

She had keenly watched Howard Vinton all the past summer! And, scan him never so critically, he had not made the expected "break!" His twenty-eight years had given his tall form a well-knit strength,—his sun-burned face showed open manly features, a sweeping trooper's mustache,—a

good square chin, and his steady dark eyes were cordial and frank in their glances!

A world wanderer,—a lettered Harvard man,—his name was already known in review and magazine in the columns of great journals and the lighter "lurid covers!" His family had not been "sold to slavery in America,"—there were yet some English Vintons, and he had a neat bit of property! A mighty sportsman and yachtsman, he had been gladly welcomed at the "United Service" at Portsmouth and the Cowes Yacht Club!

His "nasal twang" was no more "en evidence" than "potatoes galore" are in modern Ireland, and he had not forged a Bill of Exchange on Coutt's Bank,—he had raised up no Fenian Army,—he had not "flourished a revolver" and shot out every gas light at the club dinners, a la "Buffalo Bill's Last Supper!"

He did not fleece unsuspecting nobles at leviathan poker bets,—and he did not tell "unvarnished tales" of apocryphal veracity, to confound the homekeeping Briton.

He was therefore voted a "very proper sort of fellow" by the officers of the Connaught Ranges,—the Royal Artillery,—the Worcester Regiment,—and on H. M. steamers "Terrible," "Thunderer," and "Dreadnaught!" The mess agreed that he could "hand, reef and steer," and put away no more than his fair share of "navy sherry."

The winter had passed on quietly and the "dreaded American outbreak" had not yet occurred! Captain Enos Drage was not of a marrying family,—he was as unsentimental as a druidical stone! He had never "capered nimbly to the lascivious pleasings of the lute," for the various services which he had adorned had kept him far too busy to fall into the outstretched and yearning arms of lovely women!

Enos Drage had long been familiar with "the States," the "terra incognita" of the Briton, and he had even looked up Mr. Vinton's standing at home. The

young man was rated "A1—***— for twenty-one years at Lloyds," on the skipper's mental register!

And as he really had learned to admire and trust the bright self-possessed young fellow, he had allowed him to glide into the tranquil harbor of St. Aubrey's Villa unchallenged!

Enos Drage still worshiped the mental picture of his niece Mary, who had gone happily away to India with the gallant Arnot!

And the silent flight of years never warned him that "The Child" was now the glowing image of her mother,—living, loving, and ready to be loved again! It was only the argus-eyed Miss Lavinia who "kept the cases" on Love's young dream! And hence, the spinster was resolved this very morning to "speak to Enos" upon his return!

A shadowy misgiving to this effect agitated Howard Vinton, whose Napoleonic ideas of love led him to make the first attack.

And so, when the forms of Miss Lavinia and her attendant maid had disappeared, Howard Vinton turned and said: "Lily! Come up to the drawing room! I must speak to you before Captain Drage returns! I feel that this is no ordinary venture which takes us both so far away! He will be here soon, and before I say 'yes or no' to him—I wish to speak to you!"

The young man was kept waiting in the stately second-floor rooms for some time!

The beautiful girl was still seated at the bay window below, thinking over all the dear days of the past summer, all the stolen interviews at rout and garrison ball,—at the play,—the suppers,—the musicales of the happy winter. It was not in the calm lethargy of the four o'clock teas that she had been drawn to her unacknowledged lover!

They had together threaded every nook of Portsea,— Landport,— Southsea,— Gosport,— Forton,— Alverstoke, and Brockhurst! Captain Drage,—a tireless walker,—always raced ahead with a slim curate,

once a stroke oar, and so, left the two strangely met friends to wander on in a leisurely after chase!

On yacht and launch they had weathered together every headland of the Isle of Wight,—the young fellow often thrilled with the glance of her laughing eyes as the salt spray showered her golden locks! Long days at Portsdown Hill,—the shades of Netley Abbey,—merry jaunts to Carisbrooke Castle,—to the faded glories of Wolsey's palace now came back!

They had sat among the yellowing gorse above the Needles,—they had wandered under the dim religious light of Arundel Cathedral! They had wondered at the beautiful interior of Petworth House,—and fed the slim deer together in beautiful Cowdray Park!

And this present coming summer had its own expectant pleasures in waiting!

There was golf—and lawn tennis,—riding parties,—the races,—the glorious yachting,—the moonlight concerts! There were the field days,—the smart reviews,—the great naval gatherings, and, in the glow of the summer days, the whirr of the "cycle" wheel called to the brave and fair!

And now suddenly, Miss Lily Arnot was brought face to face with the fact that "this sort of thing could not go on forever!"

Then she resolutely mounted the stair and, with a slight defensive tinge of coldness, said: "Howard! what do you wish to say to me?"

The American had photographed the conventional passersby for the thousandth time in his mind,—that eminently decorous crowd of the selected British public, and he turned quickly as she spoke. "Only this! I intended to spend the summer here, near you—for your own sake!

"That is all over now!" he ruefully said. "If I go away on this quest to please your uncle, it is not fair that you should misunderstand me! I will only go with him—on one condition!"

The fair young girl was trembling now in a secret delight, which she did not dare to own! "What do

you mean!" she said, as she nervously glanced at the open door! One moment of yielding to an impulse of the heart and she would have been the swift Camilla!

"I mean that I will only go with him—if I may come back to you! I know what Captain Enos is! All fire and flame at heart! He has some one of his Flying Dutchman quests ahead! I am perfectly foot loose! But—I will go out on no path that does not lead me back to you!"

The secret of their lives was trembling on their lips! Howard Vinton's Napoleonic boldness had oozed gently away, and he learned in the glances of the English girl's eyes what it is to face a woman, standing trembling with a pure soul shining out of her fearless eyes!

"Listen!" he said, gently, as he saw her awakened soul struggling in her face. "Miss Lavinia has her own ideas! I saw it in her face this morning!" he smiled.

"As for Captain Enos,—he has no more sentiment than a lobster! He is a perfectly unmanageable man! He will always have his own way!

"Now, he will be back here in an hour! He will start old Engineer Jack and myself off on the double quick! I will not be fired off like a projectile, point blank, even by Captain Drage!

"I will not be calmly snuffed out like a candle by Miss Lavinia! I leave my Yes or No to you! You have an hour now to think it over! Will you write to me at Smyrna if I go out with your Uncle Enos? May I come back to you,—after I have served that dear old thunderbolt, for your sake? Now I am going out for a spin on the Common! If I strike for Clarence Parade, the South Parade, or the Pier, I will show off to Aunt Lavinia! Don't answer me now! Think it all over! If you decide to say Yes to my desire to come back here, you can tell me on my return!"

The young Napoleon of Love edged toward the door with an artful show of manly decision.

"And if I say No, Howard?" faltered the Lily of Southsea, detaining her slave with a glance!

In her heart she knew that he loved the very green daisy starred turf upon which she had walked,—for her own sweet sake!

"If you say No!" replied Mr. Howard Vinton, raising her slender hand and kissing it tenderly, "I will not go out to the Levant! There are some men here chartering a yacht to go and shoot big game up in Kamchatka. I might as well be there as any other place,—if you decide against me!"

He slowly descended the stairway, and as he turned he saw her standing with her hands clasped before her, and the roses which he had brought to her that morning were trembling in her slender fingers!

The excited American dared not look up at the windows of the shaded drawing room, but all unseen by him, two gentle eyes followed his retreating form with a suddenly awakened tenderness. "He goes out there into that dangerous land, giving up all his plans, and, for my sake!"

The Lily of Southsea whispered this in a fond apology to her wildly beating heart! She heard the sound of footsteps, and then swiftly fled away to her own room! She dared not admit to the blushing face which she saw in her own mirror that she had already decided that she would write!

But a sly rosy god, Cupid, of mystic power, had stolen into her heart, and the whisper of his voice had warned her. "He must not go away—forever!"

Lily Arnot lingered in the impregnable citadel of young womanhood, hidden from all, until the wheels of the arriving fly and the rasping voice of Captain Drage recalled her from a day dream!

"They must not suspect," she murmured with an innocent dissimulation, as she descended, for the Captain's voice was lifted up, demanding:

"Lavinia! Lily! Where's young Vinton! I must see him at once!" And so she descended, and turned

over her prisoner, the old engineer, Jack Masterson, as a momentary stop-gap to the energetic veteran.

Miss Lavinia reinforced the garrison soon, and the sound of bustle proved the old sailor's haste! He sporadically explained his trip to the spinster while awaiting the return of Vinton! The sturdy old engineer was already off to make up his kit!

"You'll get your whole tip from Mr. Vinton!" roared Captain Drage.

"How do you know that he can go with you, Uncle?" timidly hazarded Lily Arnot.

"Go! Of course, he'll go! What did he say to you? Why wouldn't he go?"

And the gleeful girl then sped away to her hospitable duties fortified in her favorable decision by a dutiful desire to advance "her uncle's interests"! Neither of the women dared to question the old Sphinx!

True daughters of Eve, they enjoyed this slight flavor of imperative command which stimulated their peaceful lives!

Mr. Howard Vinton had slowly retraced his steps and waited till the fly had departed. He had taken a "bracer" as far as Nelson's old cannon and the great Victory anchor, and had gravely bowed to the returning Miss Lavinia.

"She has an eagle eye, that same dear old girl!" he shuddered. "She would lead a forlorn hope as gamely as the Napier brothers; and I must not open my trenches till I am sure of her aid! And that dear old boy, Drage! Here I have studied navigation from the ark down,—I've roved over Fitting Basin,—Rigging Basin,—Repairing Basin,—and Steam Basin! I've burrowed on Whale Island. I've learned to know every porthole of the Victory,—every historic hulk,—every captured gun! I've chummed with the service from Boatswain to Admiral, at his bidding, and worn my soles out tramping the decks of Britain's fleet just to please him! I have even admitted that the British yacht can 'down us' at last! All this for—Lily! And now the dear old duffer drags me away!

It's a long road, but it will lead me back to her, or Captain Enos Drage will have to navigate the Aegean Sea alone!"

The young man stole gently back into the mansion under the welcoming smile of the appreciative housemaid, who had a proper young sergeant of the Connaught Rangers on the string! She already discerned "Miss Lily's young man" to be a conquering hero, "in futuro."

Mr. Howard Vinton never knew if it was fairy,—passing angel,—or mortal woman, who glided by him as he was hanging up his top coat! But the sweetest voice in the whole world had whispered, "I will write! Go for my sake,—and—come back to me!"

"The Child" fled from the sound of her own voice—and when he joined the little circle at luncheon he observed one of his roses of the morning caught in the true blue knot at her slender throat!

Hence and therefore, Mr. Howard Vinton heartily cried: "Yes, Captain, I'll go! I'm game for anything, if you desire it!" when the veteran hurled out his question as to the young man's willingness, between two mouthfuls of "chutney."

"I knew you'd go!" Captain Enos nodded. "We've a good bit to do to get ready!" and then the laughing eyes of Lily Arnot told her triumphant lover what her rosy fingers would not even dare to write to him.

Miss Lavinia, in heroic mood, recalled Nelson's motto, as to England's expectations, and yet her heart really softened at the young fellow's prompt acquiescence.

When the hurried luncheon was finished, Enos Drage said, sharply, "Lavinia, I can tell you in half an hour all I wish to. So, you and Lily can arrange my kit for Malta. I leave for town to-morrow. Jack Masterson has a hundred pound note to break, and he will be aboard the Paris steamer at Southampton at midnight. I will go up there with Mr. Vinton and start him away I take the 'four-forty' for London to-morrow. As we will have a lot of writing to do,

Howard, you can just have a chat with Lily, while I talk with my sister."

So it fell out that two very embarrassed young people sat watching the dismal drip, drip, of the afternoon rain, which had thrown its gray shroud over sunny Southsea.

They could hear Enos Drage's explosive directions as he threw around his boxes and tossed heaps of rejected clothing around. His replies to Lavinia's anxious housewifery were staccato objections to taking enough luggage for a three years' cruise.

"I tell you, my dear old girl," he cried, "I don't know where I am going and how long I will stay! Moreover, I don't care! You are all right! You have 'the Child' to keep you company. My movements will depend on circumstances, and so, my stay may be three months, six, or even nine. The less I take the better. Don't load me down with kindness!"

The precious moments were slipping away. Howard Vinton had gazed at a South Sea idol, an engraved walrus tooth, a dried Japanese mermaid, and a Malay pirate's skull, neatly cutlass cleft, with a gruesome inscription, "E. D., 1853," but he dared not face the blue-eyed English girl, who faltered, "And your kit, have you nothing to pack, Howard?"

Her lover sighed. "Since I left college and placed my old aunt in charge of the family home, I have followed the rule of the newspaper army. A flat case with linen and a dress suit, my great coat, grip sack, dressing bag, and my traveling tweeds and serges are all I need, save a check book, pipe and pouch, a six-shooter, I confess, a good umbrella, and my old blackthorn. Of course, now, pith hat and puggery are de rigeur as a globe trotter. I need little; my wants are simple. We journalists, tourists, writers, or literary jacks of all trades, always fly light.

"Of course, if I had an English home, I should need lots of things, and,—some one to pack them! I went in once to an outfitting shop of the Strand, and found that a 'British officer' needs an outfit of some

twelve hundred pounds sterling, filling three or four wagons, in order to go and be slain by a naked Zulu, who goes to war with only a lozenge-shaped hide shield, and a barbed iron spear-head stuck in a stick, as his entire worldly goods."

The Lily of Southsea's eyes were downcast. "Your life is a very lonely one, after all, in the great world's crowd. You need a real home circle!" she sighed.

"I left the golden circle broken forever," sadly said Vinton, "when my father and mother joined their shadowy hands, and because of that same loneliness, England seems to me now to be my best abiding place. I do love your people, your clean-cut sense of right and wrong, the decent letting alone that one gets, and the general mental, moral and bodily cleanliness which divides you more sharply from the go-as-you-please continent, than your 'silver streak' of the Channel."

Howard Vinton was eying Lily Arnot keenly. The presence of stern old Enos Drage, and the black satin armor clad Miss Lavinia, had wrapped the girl in the pale gray reserve of British "good form." She was afraid of him,—afraid of herself,—afraid of her too expressive down-cast eyes,—and afraid of the two case-hardened old life veterans, almost within ear-shot.

"That girl has not a single bit of feeling!" he groaned, and he then very gloomily recalled some lines about "faultily faultless, icily regular," etc., etc., which, after all, did not fit the exquisite face of the woman whom he madly loved, and who knew, too, in her own little bounding heart, that he loved her to distraction.

Bible memories of "a party who served seven years for another party" returned to vex him, and he knew at heart that the demon of "cant," of "good form," of the old established social procedure, held them artificially apart.

His own captive manly heart was now beating under the very roses trembling on her womanly breast. He

looked in vain for a sign of the graceful vision which had glided by in the hall.

The rosy lips which had whispered, "I will write," were pale and trembling enough when the decisive tones of Enos Drage were heard below in a bugle call to action.

"I will call a fly, Lavinia, and 'the Child' can take your list and get my things. She knows all the shops. Perhaps, Mr. Vinton wants something! Ask him, for we have no time to spare. Vinton and I must now go over our business and make our private notes."

The measured tread of Miss Lavinia was heard upon the lowest stair when Lily Arnot sprang to Howard Vinton's side. Her eyes were filled with a strange new light. She laid her little hand upon his arm, and blushed rosy red as she whispered: "You have forgotten something! Let me get you, at least, your writing materials,—to write to me,—you know!"

It was well that Lavinia Drage was deliberate. Had she entered the room a moment sooner she might have seen a well-set young fellow kissing rapturously a pretty hand which had transferred one of the roses to Mr. Howard Vinton's coat lapel! She might have heard the whisper "Lily! My Lily! You must give me a half hour, alone, before I go! For, I shall miss 'the Child' more than I can tell you!"

The loving answer of assent was shining in the English girl's eyes when the satin encased Lavinia boldly strode into the drawing-room.

Miss Lily Arnot, as became a soldier's daughter, was a bit of a strategist, and she had also learned diplomacy from the wise old "Shun Lee," who was a naval Metternich.

And so, with a demure glance, she hastened away for paper to jot down "any needful articles" which Howard Vinton might desire to "take along."

Had he been outspoken and honest, the first entry on the singularly foolish list achieved would have been a "wedding ring," and the second, "the Child" herself!

But, now dimly conscious that the final winding

road toward the hymeneal altar led on toward Smyrna, with a future backward bend toward "sunny Southsea," Mr. Howard Vinton turned away from the Lily of Southsea, and slowly descended the stair to where Captain Enos Drage, R. N., was already seated at his desk, with a Mediterranean chart.

He had unrolled a pile of Eastern handbooks, and a couple of blank notebooks were at hand.

"Now, my boy, give me your undivided attention!" said Enos, as he locked the door. "I have got rid of the two women. We can go over this whole matter in peace. I wish you to understand all the risks you are taking, and the reward which is before us. Then, if you go in whole hearted into this matter, it will prove to be the best operation of your life!

"I'm sending Jack Masterson to Smyrna with you. He is a game bull dog of the old breed. Sailor, steam engineer, man-o'-war'sman, and globe trotter! I've seen him calmly handle the levers on a China river steamer when five thousand yelling pig-tails were sweeping her decks with a rain of gingal bullets. He drinks but little, and he is as honest as the edge of a sword. Jack has been my private property since the days of the 'Shun Lee.'

"He knows the whole Orient, from Odessa to Vladivostock! He was 'first' on a volunteer fleet boat some years for the Russians, and he coasted the Black Sea, the Aegean, and the Eastern Mediterranean for them, for years. He knows lingua Franca, jabbers Romaic and Armenian, and he has picked up Turkish and Arabic. With your faultless French, German and Spanish, you two ought to be a team.

"Of course Jack jabbers Russian like a moujik! It's twenty years since he first cried, 'Ya loublo,' to the pretty Tartar girls at Odessa and Sevastopol. He is to do what I tell him, always to obey your orders, and never to show his face here again, if anything happens to you. Now, what am I going out for?

"There's one place that is backed by a hundred million sterling—only one in England. It is the Chief

Inspectorship of Lloyds! I don't need the money it brings, but I want to gain that place. I see my clear way to it if I can only break up this pirate gang of Komanos and Company. In the last ten years, they have baffled every one of Lloyds' smartest men. Old John Higginbotham will be Lord Mayor some day. He told me last night that the place was as good as mine if we can manage to succeed.

"The trouble is, that but one man at a time has been sent out there. Poor Robinson! He was most active and energetic. They soon found it out. They killed him like a rat, at Smyrna.

"Now, my idea is, that three men—you, I and Jack—can not be as easily watched, made way with, or fooled as any one stranger.

"I will leave Van Lennep to go right on in his place, and, while at Smyrna, you must never even enter his office. You can see him at the consul's, at the Hotel Huck, at the English Club, or ride out and go boat sailing with him. But, you are just to play the Yankee traveler, or a modern Eothen, doing the 'dreamy dilettante,' and perhaps a bit of newspaper correspondence.

"They are always deucedly afraid to kill a newspaper man!" roundly said Drage. "Now, I will have your credentials made out to the English ambassador at Constantinople, of the highest. You can always meet Van Lennep on the war vessels and at the consul's house, at your little dinners of three. Fitzgerald's a very good fellow. I will guide you from Malta, the consul will always attend to your mail and telegraph work, and on every British war vessel in the East, you will have a secret friend in its commander.

"You can take refuge or passage on any. Now, I'll call you to me, or join you, or send one of Lloyds' higher men, just as circumstances call for. Will you go? Will you take the joint risk? There's a splendid money reward, too, ahead of us!

"John Higginbotham told me that twenty-five thou-

sand pounds would be presented by Lloyds for the breaking up of this dangerous gang. Will you go?"

Howard Vinton had just caught sight of the flower-face of "the Child" as she tripped daintily over the slate sidewalk to the waiting fly.

He said gravely: "I will aid you, Captain Drage! I may even get a book out of the thing! But I won't work for money. You can pay me in another way. You must have that Chief Inspectorship. We'll go in to win—Jack, you and I!"

Their hands met in a firm grip, as the delighted Enos cried "All right! You shall have anything you want! I knew that you were game to the core! And the money—we'll talk later of that, when we have earned it."

It was three long hours before "Shun Lee" Drage had finished his minute directions, and Mr. Howard Vinton placed the notebook, filled up by "Shun Lee" himself, in his breast pocket.

"Burn that! Destroy it! Chuck it overboard, if you are ever caught in a tight place!" said Enos, when they had finished their first council. "Before you get out to Smyrna, Van Lennep and Fitzgerald will have this whole business by cipher cable and the Foreign Office sealed bag mail. Now, to dinner! The rest we can talk on the train. It leaves at ten, and your Paris boat pulls out at midnight.

"You can leave here at eight, and get all your traps. You move on Lloyds' money, remember, now—unlimited backing!"

Even the stern Miss Lavinia saw the necessity of giving the young American a chance to look over Miss Lily Arnot's purchases.

There is a rosy veil which covers even yet in memory the fond dissimulation of that half hour, but Vinton's eyes were misty when he examined the "stationery" on the voyage to Paris. There was a little case, with a picture which spoke of golden days far in the future, and a silken curl tied with a true love-knot of blue.

The picture was inscribed:

"Write to—your Lily!"

Bluff Jack Masterson watched the "young master" as they rushed along, snugly billeted "en second," over the beautiful Normandy dales.

"'E's in rare good trim, an' a thorough out and outer! As fit as a Derby winner!" the stout sailor ruminated. Howard Vinton had been his sailing companion on many a smart cutter dash in the choppy Channel seas, and the old engineer dearly loved the game Yankee.

Both of their hearts went back to Southsea, where old Enos was now "folding his Arabian tents" for the Malta trip.

Jack Masterson was fondly reminiscent of the rosy Abigail who was destined, later, to divide his "bit o' brass," as "Mrs. Masterson," and the young American dreamed of the fair dear head pillowed afar across the "silver streak."

"I think I'll consecrate that 'stationery' at Paris," he fondly decided. "By Jove! I'll write, too, and thank dear old Lavinia, and I'll send 'the Child' the very prettiest 'cadeau' that decent good taste will allow!"

For the "stationery" had been given him with a fondly whispered greeting to open it "only at Paris," and Love's gentle subterfuge told him what the proud lips of the English girl would not frame—her entire acquiescence in his being "paid off" on his return in kind—and—not in money!

And though parted and lonely days were the lot of one, with dangers confronting the other, "the Child" and her manly, chivalrous lover were both strangely happy on their parting night.

Old "Shun Lee" slept that night with one eye open, and dreamed of the defeat of "Komanos and Company."

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW YORK HERALD'S CORRESPONDENT'S INSTRUCTIONS.

Mr. Howard Vinton sprang alertly from the Havre train as it rolled into the Gare St. Lazare, and springing into a fiacre, hastened to his old haunt, the Hotel Choiseul.

Jack Masterson "bore a hand" with their slender luggage, and was as fresh as a three-year-old, notwithstanding several pulls at his flask in honor of "the girl he left behind him."

The head porter of the hotel tipped his hat, and handed out a couple of "petit bleus" with alacrity. He was glad to see the handsome face of the young American back again in the snug courtyard of the Choiseul.

"Send up a good breakfast to my room, Jean!" Vinton ejaculated. "Biftek aux pommes, coffee, rolls, and all that, about enough for four Frenchmen!" Vinton gayly indicated his brawny companion as a "mangeur extraordinaire."

"Look here, Jack!" cried the American, when they were safe in their room, "you must keep straight as a string. Captain Drage wires me that this suspicious steamer, the old 'Alessandro Cornaro,' is already on the docks at Trieste, fitting out for Smyrna. McGregor (once a chief of the P. and O.) is overhauling her engines. You must get a job on that boat at any risk. So mind your eye here. No frolics, you know!"

Jack grinned in triumph, as he blurted out, "Old Sandy McGregor, the king of marine engineers. Why, only the bottle kept him from being the head machinery inspector of the P. and O. I know every hair of his old gray head! I was 'greaser' for him when he ran the 'Bat' into Wilmington, through the whole Yankee fleet in '62. She was a water witch! But I went over to Liverpool from Bermuda with a cargo of cot-

ton as second engineer, and then drifted off to China, with Sherard Osborn's gunboats, and later, wound up on the 'Shun Lee.'"

"Splendid!" cried Vinton. "Then you can count on McGregor. I want to telegraph the Captain."

"'Mac' will surely give me a berth, and he would share his last shot in the locker with me," said Jack, "but I warn yc, Master Howard, he's a dead game man. 'E won't give nothink away! For when he got the sack from the old line, he went into the 'fancy' service. 'E's laid a many a tender one in a soft berth, splittin' thc swag up with these tramp captains. Ye see the owners of a tramp steamer get her well piled with insurance, and when she's fifteen or twenty years old, they let her rip, and the cargo can take care of itself!

"Them cargo chaps is also fly to the game. They stick foreign companies and clean up all their old odds and ends.

"W'y, my eye! the warehouses of Antwerp, Rotterdam, Bordeaux, Liverpool and Marseilles, as well as Genoa and Trieste, are combed for all the old unsalable stuff to weight down these 'fancy ones.' An' then it's off, to choose a good place and—a fair excuse.

"No!" said Jack Masterson, filling his pipe with good smuggled "bird's-eyc," "McGregor will stay by the ship and his orders. But we're on the cargo lay—a watchin' these damned land lubbers. Sandy won't care, and I'll tell him I'm keepin' out of the way of a little sheath knife frolic. He'll hide me for good.

"There's somethin' desperate up! For Sandy always gets his own prices. He was run all around the Black Sea, watched by insurance spies, when he had an old four-master with fifty thousand pound sterling covered on her worn-out carcass, and only sand ballast inside! 'E's that neat hand that he laid the forward half of her high and in the broad street of below Buyukdere and Istambol! He just rushed her down in the Bosporus current at twenty-two knot an hour into a tide rip. The nose of her went bang up out of the water,

and the stern kept on a travelin' Them there Turkish blacksmiths found an iron mine! They have been workin' the wreck up for two years, in house, shop and shipsmith work. She broke right in two amidships. 'E's a dare devil is Sandy. 'Obey orders, if you bust owners,' 'e says."

With a sharp rap at the door, came a note for Mr. Howard Vinton, to report at once for instructions at the branch office of the New York "Herald," 49 Avenue de l'Opera.

Vinton tore open the note, and shouted in glee as he read, "Come down and see the chief at ten sharp. He wants you to go out to Smyrna and watch the development of the Armenian muddle."

"Look here, Jack," said the American, "all that you have to do is to get on that boat, and stick to her till I meet you at the 'Scottish Arms' public in Smyrna. If we should have occasion to use Sandy McGregor on the quiet, Lloyds will pension him like a victorious general for life. Does he know the Levant well?"

"He can sketch every island in the archipelago from memory, and he was out with Hobart Pasha in the Russian war of '77."

"Well, I will start you straight on, by Munich and the Brenner Pass to Venice and Trieste to-night. All you have to do is to telegraph me to the British Embassy, Constantinople, and also to old Captain Enos, to 'Hotel Croix de Malte,' Malta, that you've got your job. If there's any break, watch the 'Alessandro Cornaro' till she sails. Find out everything you can and then jump on the first Austrian Lloyds' boat and come on to Smyrna. You have the ticket for drawing your money from our Lloyds' agent at Trieste!"

"Aye, aye, sir, all snug, an'—the Captain's orders, too! I'm fit and right!" replied Jack.

"Then," said Vinton, "as I'm writing to Miss Lavinia to-day, I'll just tell her to keep an eye on Mary while we're gone. If you stand straight all through, both she and her brother will set you up."

"Good enough!" grinned old Jack. "There's that

Fogarty, sergeant-major of the Connaught Rangers, him of the free-rollin' eye and the gold-crown chevrons, the old lady might as well forbid him the house."

"Jack," laughed Vinton, "when I get your telegram that you're aboard that ship, as stoker, greaser, steward, keeper, I don't care what, I'll write to Miss Lily and she will put Fogarty's eye out in a jiffy, for Mary dotes on the young mistress."

"You're right, so she do," said Jack. "I'm standing at quarters, yours to command!"

"All right! I'll go and telegraph!" said the American, as he sped away to the "Herald" office.

Howard Vinton never felt better fitted for an adventurous outing, yet as he drove along, his thoughts wandered back to the vine-clad St. Aubrey's Villa, where, at this very moment, the stern Miss Lavinia and "the Child" were deftly slipping many undesired articles of personal comfort into the four-wheeler now waiting, ready to bear Enos Drage away to catch the London train.

Miss Lavinia, thoroughly broken in to discipline, asked very few questions, for she knew that her eccentric brother's business affairs were always confidential. The stern old veteran, to whom the world was but a beaten path, briskly bade his sister a cheery "good-bye."

"The old rule, my girl," he said. "You'll have a weekly letter, and, failing in this, a telegram, unless I'm at sea. I'll take the night boat over to Paris, run down to Marseilles and chance it as far as Malta with a Johnny Crapaud steamer."

"Will you see Mr. Vinton soon, uncle?" queried the cautious Lily of Southsea.

"Why, certainly, my dear child," cried Enos, as with a last glance at his watch he cried, in horror, "Drive on!" and so all of the loving message of the blushing girl which reached "Shun Lee's" ear was:

"Tell him ——" The rattle of the wheels drowned the sound of "the Child's" voice, and she retreated, in a sad confusion, into her own den.

And then and there she pondered for half an hour as to the propriety of "a girl in her position," telegraphing to "a young man in Paris."

The voice of Cupid triumphed, however, for Mary cheerfully bore the dispatch herself to the branch post-office.

And, strangely, neither of them mentioned it to Miss Lavinia, who was now heroically setting Enos' rooms to rights. The Lily feared to own her hardihood, and rosy Mary, mindful of the absent Jack, decided "to stand in with all true lovers."

The curt nod which she gave Sergeant-Major Fogarty of the Rangers, passing on his way, in all his regimental splendor, the morning report book under his arm, to see the colonel, caused the chevroned Adonis to cry, "Holy St. Patrick, but we are high and mighty this morning!"

For, with the strange inconsistency of womanhood, Jack Masterson's chances had improved fifty per cent., in the first night of absence. Women always go in for fortitude, and that sort of thing. It is the dear especial luxury of their charming sex!

While waiting for Mr. James Gordon Bennett to call him in, Howard Vinton pondered over all the rough hints of Jack Masterson.

He saw for the first time the schemes of the assured —the many strange ways of disposing of undesirable ships and getting rid of faked up and unsalable cargoes. The singular mortality among old broken-backed tramps, the dangers of certain long voyages and distant seas, now took on a new meaning.

"With a fellow like Sandy McGregor, and a sly captain to match, I can see where 'Komanos and Company' have a rich field to work in," he decided. "The rogues working ashore, the villains and thieves acting at sea. It's only on a par with bank wrecking, railroad stealing, trust conspiracies, sham corporation floating, and visionary mines.

"God help the poor, confiding British investor!" he murmured. Stout old Shylock's words came back

and haunted him. "But ships are but boards, sailors but men; there be land rats and water rats, water thieves and land thieves—I mean pirates; and, then, there is the peril of waters—winds and rocks."

"Sandy McGregor is a 'water rat,' and Komanos and Company are 'land thieves,' and I presume the astute Sandy will either pull out a sea plug, or else slap the 'Alessandro Cornaro' ashore at full speed as directed. The whole modern business game is now but Talleyrand's old idea, 'Other people's money.' If Enos Drage mistakes not, we three will have a lively old chase of it."

The clock dial told him that the last of the three agents of Lloyds had started for London, before he stood mute in presence of the strange man who is the autocrat of the greatest journal in the two hemispheres.

For, carp as you will, the New York "Herald" is the Herald,—that tells the whole story, "and great is Diana of the Ephesians!" The New York "Herald" sees as deeply into the tangled whirl of modern life as any other organ of public expression. It has the rare merit that it serves neither king nor prelate, party nor scheme, that it has no hidden spinal influence of unacknowledged guidance. It is simply and squarely itself, and, without fear and trembling, it faces the thinking world!

Howard Vinton did not face the autocrat of the "Herald" very long.

With a nod the autocrat began: "Vinton, I want a reliable man to go over to Smyrna and watch the growth of this Armenian muddle for three months. I need a man whom I can rely upon, a man who will be always there, and not wandering in the moon when wanted. You can get over quickly by Constantinople, and then report by wire, here, your arrival. See the editor and get your special credentials and instructions. Can you leave to-night?"

"Yes, on one condition!" firmly said Vinton. "That I am not asked to leave Smyrna, and if my time runs

out there I am free to watch over some private interests which I have there afterwards, until I report back at Paris."

"Good!" said Bennett, a slight frown melting away from his imperious brow. "We'll use other specials for any traveling duty. That's all! See Walton at once. Good-bye!"

And before Howard Vinton had reached the editor's room, the autocrat of the "Herald," buried in the smoke of his cigarette, had already forgotten the man and the assignment to all human appearance.

"See here, Vinton!" laughed Managing Editor Walton, "don't let the almond-eyed houris over there tempt you into any funny business. Don't rush off and pitch into some fourth-class war as Pasha Kaimaikan or Bimbashi. J. G. B. sends you out there to be there, to stay there, and not carve out a laureled path to fame.

"Some years ago he sent Wilder over to Athens to await orders. There was a thousand pounds advance and a fat billet. Now, Wilder, who had roved over the world almost from pole to pole in the "Herald's" service, was an inimitable genius, a dashing fellow. He rashly studied the interests of the journal, and slipped off and mixed himself up in some exciting events near by.

"He telegraphed us a mass of stuff from his self-appointed station, and was simply rewarded for his zeal with orders to report here 'instanter,' to the chief in person.

"When he got here he received a bonus of six months' salary to cut off all old claims of gratitude, and—was sacked—forever. 'Where shall I go?' he said. 'Go to the devil,' was the chief's reply, and I think he's on the way there now! J. G. B. likes you. I know that. Don't think that he forgets. You stay there like a sentinel on post. He'll walk in here some morning and say, 'Call Vinton—at once—by wire!' If you are not there, he will quietly say, 'Cut him off, recall him, and,—drop him!' So, mind your eye!"

"Don't fear! I will content myself at Smyrna!" answered Howard Vinton, with a vision of the future bend in the road leading back to the Lily of Southsea.

"Well, come back at four. I'll have all your credentials and papers ready, youngster," kindly said Walton. "One last word! There is no place in the world where more cosmopolitan deviltry is mixed up together than along the league of the long quay at Smyrna. Be prudent! Go around at night, and well armed, too. Let the fair Fatimas alone!

"There are hundreds of Greeks, Armenians, French, English, Germans, Italians, and all the wandering daughters of Eve, thronging the booths, cafes, theaters, saloons and cirques of that polyglot parade. 'Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice.'

"I think all in all the Smyrniotes of the business and official circles are the very foxiest devils alive. The five thousand resident Franks are up in line with the eighty thousand Turks, forty thousand Greeks, fifteen thousand Jews, and ten thousand Armenians!

"The place is filled with a gang of desperate adventurers, French, German and Italians, for no one police chief ever brings a man back from Smyrna. When they are not preying on the world at large out there, they just devour each other. And I grade them as follows in vileness: Jew, Greek, Russian, Armenian,—for the essence of human keenness is your Armenian! He double discounts the Polish Jew, who is Russian born, and, as the Irishman says, that 'bangs Banagher!'"

"The leading commercial circles?" seriously said Vinton.

"Oh!" replied Walton, "a number of great interests there are, of course, represented by men of character, who get double pay for facing cholera, Turkish brutality, and the climate. Moreover, their families usually go out and try it for a season, and then drift back home. So it is that the sound of the voice of Mariamne, Zuleika, Maritza, and Fatima is often heard where an 'unbroken silence' is popularly supposed to

rule. Men meet each other there in the clubs, cafes, the swell hotels, on board ship or at the consulates, but in their homes, as a rule, never. I sincerely hope that you are not impressionable, Vinton?"

"I am no squire of dames!" shortly said Vinton. "Our contract is for service under Minerva, the emblem of your august journal!"

"Don't forget your owls, and so keep both your eyes open at night in Smyrna. You'll need them," laughed Walton. "The riff-raff loaf around by day, but at night Smyrna hums with the winged messengers from the bottomless pit."

"I'm not afraid!" rejoined Vinton. "I've been already twice around the world. I have safely meandered the Bowery, I lived in Leadville in its palmy days, and I spent a year at Chicago!"

"That settles it!" replied Walton. "Say no more! You are prepared,—for the worst!"

The time hung heavily on the young man's hands while awaiting the arrival of Enos Drage's telegram from London, and watching for the hour of his departure. He had at last decided to convoy Jack Masterson on as far as Munich, by Basle, and see him started off for Trieste over the Brenner.

For the mariner was like the graceful sea gull, sadly bewildered and out of place when on land and hemmed in by wooded crests.

"D——n me!" stoutly said Jack Masterson, "I go about here in Paris and either run ashore or miss stays. There's no seaway. It's the bloomin' houses as does it!"

Howard Vinton, suddenly sentimental, meandered the arcaded Golcondas of the Palais Royal till he found a fit "cadeau" for Miss Lily Arnot. It was a spray of golden lilies of the valley, caught up by a true lover's knot, with a little diamond trembling in each of the graceful bells.

"I hardly think that this little emblem will be misunderstood," mused the pilgrim of love, who now

yearned to be off to Smyrna. He had dispatched it when he returned to the "Choiseul."

Jack Masterson was pacing the courtyard, as if it were the quarterdeck, and was now blowing a cloud in silent comfort.

Mr. Vinton was cheered with Enos Drage's dispatch from London. "Off to-night for Malta via Marseilles. Telegraph to the Grand Hotel, Louvre, from Basle. All is well. Full mail dispatched to consul, Smyrna."

"The old sea dog is truly no loiterer," thought his young forerunner, as he listlessly opened the other, and then he hastily walked away, lest the stout engineer could read the lines so strangely moving him.

Southsea seemed to be "sunny" in its very printed name, and he deciphered the Gallic rendering of Miss Lily's English with a tenderly awakened heart. "I expect you not to spare your stationery. Write to me from Paris."

The name "Lily Arnot" brought his wandering steps to a full stop! He instantly replied to the old veteran's business communication, and yet he studied some time before he sent his answer to St. Aubrey's Villa.

"I will not spare the stationery," he worded his lines, "and I will come back for more. Letters to-day—write to British embassy, Constantinople." He dared not write the words which her loving kindness brought up, for Miss Lavinia, stern guardian of the British proprieties, rose up as an awful shade before him.

"I'll not chance it," he sadly sighed. "Lavinia Drage is a person not to be trifled with. If she took a notion, Miss Lily would be quickly plighted to some ornament of Her British Majesty's service long before I have run the gauntlet of 'Komanos and Company.'"

There was a bit of Heaven's own blue just visible above the walls of the Choiseul, and he caught there the reflection of the far-off English girl's eyes, true blue, the color of hope.

And then he left Jack Masterson on guard "his

watch on deck," and "went aloft" to pen as burning an epistle as his fanciful diction would create.

"By Jove!" he cried, "British honor is my salvation. The Lily of Southsea gets her letters intact, which may be a life-saving institution for me in this long Smyrna exile."

He made quite a serious inroad into the dainty supplies, for he seemed to "have left unsaid that which he would have said," and he now, fully repaired the omission.

A few lines to await Enos Drage satisfied his whole ideas of duty. He returned from his final "Herald" office interview ready for the road.

"There's no screen in the world like the lucky strike of the Herald billet," he mused. "It will serve to keep the Turkish officials in awe, and the very keenest Levantine will not be likely to dig under my assumed occupation to find Lloyds' secret agent under the journalistic garb."

He refrained from pressing his sage counsels upon the robust Jack Masterson, and reflected that as yet neither Drage himself nor the man-o'-war's man knew of the real nature of the proposed deviltry of the Smyrniote cabal.

While the train rushed out of the environs of Paris Howard Vinton reflected upon the singular good fortune which had so veiled his quest.

Happy Jack Masterson puffed his pipe and dreamed of the easy-going joys of Trieste. Under pretense of examining his notebook, Howard Vinton long studied the face of the fair English girl whose life seemed to be now already interlinked with his own.

There were many added reasons found in Drage's secret notebook of instructions for the convenient cloak of "Herald" correspondent.

"You can leave Van Lennep to handle Alevra, the principal agent of the Rüinone Adriatica, and Lascaris, the resident representative of the 'La Nationale.' He is obliged to have an extensive daily business and a friendly personal acquaintance with them. But be

on your guard before Mons. Lyonel Bondy, representing 'L'Ancre' at Constantinople, and his local agent, John R. Spiegenthal. Also, Reggio, of the Imperial, and Robert Hadkinson, of the 'Northern Insurance Company.' All these are splendid men, but only engaged in handling fire and life insurance at Smyrna.

"But one unguarded word, the exciting of their keen professional curiosity, might cause you to be the mark of the vengeance of 'Komanos and Company!' It is at Smyrna, as in all Oriental cities, any private person who is above the rank of bagman, or mere commercial traveler, is supposed to be either a business spy, a possible successor, or else a future enemy. Diplomats, army and navy officers and tourists are naturally exempt from these bitter local jealousies."

"It seems," growled Howard Vinton, "that the only friend whom I can count upon at Smyrna is Van Lennep, our Lloyds' man, and the fear of some disaster to both will naturally cause him to avoid me. I can, however, mingle with all the polyglot pleasure-seekers and voyagers as I will. For Smyrna seems to be a 'go-as-you-please place,' without any social scruples—a 'devil's auction.'"

The long night dragged away, and when noon time came the travelers were already rushing along past Geneva, on their road to Zurich. The glow of excitement which had characterized the romantic departure had faded, and Howard Vinton began to doubt his fitness for the singular quest before him. He envied the stolid lack of personal responsibility which characterized the rugged and adventurous engineer. The bluff Briton's stories of blockade running chases, Chinese adventures and tales of the kaleidoscopic life in the far east led by Enos Drage and his blunt follower, beguiled the long passage down the lake of Constance, and the hours fled easily away till the parting came at Munich.

Howard Vinton was surprised when Jack Masterson turned the tables upon him, as the Tyrol train was

ready to pull out. He had outfitted the engineer with all possible care for the Brenner Pass transit, and gravely adjured him to be true to the interests of the stern old "Shun Lee."

"Don't fail to telegraph me to the British Embassy at Constantinople, and take care of yourself," said Vinton. "You go on a dangerous billet!"

"Oh, my eye!" responded Masterson, "I'm only a knockabout. My ten-pound kit is not worth stealing. There is nothing in the Levant for a man to fear who has had to make his way with a cutlass through two score of yelling pig tails, and then, swim the Grand Canal under fire. These yellow devils can fight. They are merciless.

"But, Master Howard, you are going now to face the keenest scoundrels in the world alone. Every one will suspect you at Smyrna. Take my advice, don't take nothing to drink out of your Hotel, or the Scottish Arms, or the Consulate! You're only a mark for them scoundrels,—and an easy one! Don't you forget, too, to carry your 'Adams,' always well loaded, and have a knife and a good stick, too! They'll make a big play on you, too, those sleek devils of Smyrniote women mincing along the quay! There's four miles of Hell's own garden there!

"Ye see, ye can't go around much with Van Lennep! Don't you be caught off your guard a single moment, either with man or woman, or ye may wind up where many a fine fellow has—in Smyrna Bay, with a throat cut! It's when ye think ye're safe that ye're in danger!

"Excuse me," said the rough fellow, "but I want to go back home some day, and see ye drive home from the church with Miss Lily! Oh! I know! Mary told me! Bless you, she's got eyes like a ferret!" And the faithful fellow stood there with his blue eyes moist as the clanging doors warned him to break off his harangue.

The two parted with a mighty hand-grip. "Now for the straight run to the Golden Horn!" cried Vin-

ton, as he slowly drove back to the "Hotel des Quatre Saisons." He was glad to report progress to Marseilles as to Jack's departure.

"If the three of us get in good position before 'Komanos and Company' can lay out their plans in full details we may yet show them that Greek can meet Greek and be checkmated! If we can only trace out the octopus arms of this sly conspiracy then a blow at the central knot will paralyze the monster!"

With a prudence now warranted by honest Jack Masterson's warning, Howard Vinton moved directly on toward Constantinople, with no eyes for anything but his rendezvous at the "Grand Hotel Huck, Smyrna."

Fortunate in connections at Vienna, he was soon whizzing down the Danube with only two hours delay to catch the Grand Oriental Express. His artist eye ignored all the beauties of flowing river and purpled mountain.

With a special resolution of his own he affected the ordinary traveler of pleasure, and only aired his Yankeefied English. Murray's Greece, Harper's Guide Book, Mahaffy's Greek Pictures, Baedaeker's Palestine and Syria, and other books on the Levant busied his mind in the three days which sped away like a dream.

Vinton was thoroughly at home at the Golden Horn and he lingered not a moment after reaching the Grand Hotel de Pera. In the cloudless glow of the Eastern skies he forgot the raw winds and the green tumbling billows of the Solent.

A single word with the Hotel Dragoman informed him that the "Apollo," Captain Beberovich was billed to sail at sundown for Smyrna direct. The words "Traversée directe en vingt quatre heures" told Howard Vinton that another day would place him on the line in the presence of the mysterious enemy,—first upon the field, and—all alone—save for Van Lennep's veiled aid!

In a half an hour, the wearied traveler was seated

in the secretary's office of the British Embassy. An alert rosy-faced British F. O. man conducted him to a private room after his private card had been sent to the Ambassador.

"You will understand the terms of this letter," said Second Secretary Grahame. "His Excellency is supposed, officially, to know nothing of your mission! Here are your telegrams and a letter. We will send all future matters in our own sealed bag to Consul Fitzgerald at Smyrna. I will send our Legation Dragoman down to put you aboard the 'Apollo' in our official launch. This will serve to give you a mysteriously aristocratic standing on the 'Apollo.'

"You see," smiled the young diplomat, "your open circular-letter gives you all the privileges of an agent of the F. O., with no embarrassing red tape to delay you. Remember to always send out all your letters in the Consul's sealed bags! Let him also forward all your telegrams. The Home authorities are very anxious to aid in breaking up these Eastern raids upon British capital, and so we will aid to protect the British purse. You must protect your own person!

"Let me say to you, and remember always, the Levant is the region where you must trust to no one, and, also, even think twice before you trust yourself! By the way, there may be some letters in the mail your train brought. If we receive them before the 'Apollo' sails, then the Dragoman will give them to you! He will stay with you till your departure, and bring back to me any letters and telegrams which you may wish to send!

"Seal all your correspondence as a matter of course, and also use cloth-lined envelopes! There's your steamer lying down there ready at her buoy, off the Custom House Landing! I'll send down there now and reserve you a passage if you wish!"

Howard Vinton's eyes gazed out in rapture upon the splendid panorama of Constantinople spread out below their eyrie on the Pera Hill!

"Nothing in the world like it," mused the English-

man. It's a new enchantment every morning to me!"

The American understood the official delicacy of England's representative in privately offering the aid of the Embassy to Lloyds' secret champion, which he dared not in his official capacity.

"I thank His Excellency for all these kindly provisions for my safety and our future aid. I will be infinitely obliged if you will send down and secure my passage!"

He was now ready to "burn his ships" and cut off the thread which had bound him to his partners in the quest. For, bluff Jack Masterson's words were significant. "Got my berth as Head Stoker. Coaling up now and taking in ballast. Sail in three days. My chum is on board. Telegraph British Consul—Trieste."

"So old Jack is on the enemy's quarter deck! The first of our men is at his post! And Captain Enos also sailed yesterday on the 'Sphinx' for Malta! Just like the old boy's Spartan brevity. "Sail today 'Sphinx' for Malta. Report your arrival to me there as agreed."

It was well that the Secretary lingered outside directing that the choicest rooms be reserved for "a traveler of distinction," for Howard Vinton forgot his quest and all the machinations of his unknown foes to lovingly linger upon Lily Arnot's telegraphed words: "Letters and packages from Paris received. Have written two to Istambol, rest to Smyrna. Auf Wiedersehen. Lily."

The spectacle of a young man ardently kissing a very commonplace blue strip of paper and fondly repeating the tender words of the closing, caused the prudent Grahame to cough significantly ere he reentered the sanctum. He was a veteran society man. "It's just as well that you should be early aboard, for there are always numberless spies running in and out of the Embassy! We are watched here like criminals. Take your luncheon down at the Pera.

"I'll send our carriage and the Dragoman over there the very moment the mail is distributed. The bags have already come in. Here are blanks for your telegrams, and also a half-dozen of our official covers. You can send all your letters back to me by him. I will attend to all."

"I shall have every pleasure in paying my respects to you and to call and thank His Excellency, on my return!" gratefully replied the rejoicing Vinton, who was the happiest man in Constantinople. For the blue eyes of the English Lily, shining afar in all their tenderness, seemed to beam down upon him in a presage of victory.

"I've something to fight for, at any rate," mused Howard Vinton, as his carriage horses carefully picked their way along through the judiciously planted brown dogs encumbering every street and sidewalk on Pera's polyglot mountain.

"Should Enos Drage reach his life's ambition, this 'Head Inspectorship,' then even the adamantine heart of Miss Lavinia, might melt into an approval of an Anglo-American alliance. I'll be on hand to see the 'Alessandro Cornaro' steam into Smyrna. I think that I'll go in for boating, and so hire me a good lateen rigged cutter. Surely I can find some old stranded British sailor who can be picked up at the 'Scottish Arms' to be my man Friday!

"For there's no handsomer sheet of water for sailing than the fair Smyrna gulf, with the blue Aegean far out to the west, and its own glorious spread of forty miles by twenty. The little outlying villages, too, have many snug retreats, and I think that I will give my fellow Smyrniote the slip in the eavesdropping line."

The splendid salle manger of the Grand Hotel de Pera was filled with the very gayest groups of globe trotters, as Howard Vinton discussed his solitary luncheon.

Seated where the Golden Horn ran, a sapphire band, along to the west, and with the Long Bridge below

him, dreamy Seraglio Point to the south, and Asia Minor's shores narrowing at the Tour de Leandre, Vinton forgot even his departure to gaze out upon the silver cone of Mount Olympus, rising far into the blue skies. He was still tranced by the words of the first letter in which the shy Lily Arnot had found the courage to open to her lover's glances the golden treasures hidden in the heart of an English girl.

Shy, sweet and noble, her loving words seemed to burn in his brain, and to tenderly thrill his heart. He knew now that only the screen of absence was needed to give to her the courage to tell him of how she felt the community of interest which now drew their beating hearts together.

With prodigious salaams, the Maitre d' Hotel soon announced the Dragoman and carriage of the English Embassy as awaiting "Monsieur." There was a reverential awe in the manner in which the polite steward took his tip.

Certain bright-eyed birds of passage dreamily murmured, "Is he not an English lord?" Howard Vinton was truly the lord of Pera, for he had fed on the honey dew of the words of the woman, to win whose slender hand he now went forth to gage even his life.

There was a suddenly marshaled procession of the entire working staff, as the bronzed young traveler lightly sprang into the carriage which carried all the portentous distinction of the Union Jack!

Threading the slippery slopes of the inclined carriage way, Vinton was safely drawn through the howling muddle of the Galata bazaars to the crowded Customs' quay. A Turkish major sprang at once to his feet and salaamed deeply as the all important Dragoman waved his hand proudly toward the illustrious Effendi. A file of soldiers eagerly aided in the driving away of a fleet of caiques to allow the British Legation's steam launch to swing in at once. With a line of churned foam in its wake, the swift little steamer darted off to the "Apollo."

"I've the best of all the cabins reserved for 'Your

Honor,'" said the Dragoman, "and Mr. Grahame has sent a special 'Laisser passer' in Turkish, which will procure you every respect. It carries with it your right to land in any Ottoman port in the Levant. And these two letters are for you, sir."

Seated alone in the little salon, with its plate glass windows and rich silken curtains, Howard Vinton eagerly devoured "Shun Lee" Drage's last instructions from Paris.

"I went to the 'Herald' office to hunt you up. Walton kindly told me that you had a billet at Smyrna, and so our best hopes are realized so far. Our committee are urging me to make a clean sweep now that we have taken the matter in hand.

"So, youngster, my Chief Inspectorship now depends on you. For God's sake, listen to all and talk to none! Better sham ignorance of all foreign tongues, I will wait for your first report at Malta! The only man really dangerous to you is Emile Bouclair.

"As an ex-deporté, he is a desperate villain, and all the more dangerous for all his polish and early education. Van Lennep reports that Bouclair has just gone over to Constantinople.

"This gang of smugglers and villains lost their head devil in Captain Dimitri Nicolo, their pet commander, some time ago. He was run out of Asia Minor for knifing a Turkish Bimbashi at Scio, about a beautiful dancing girl.

"Bouclair has taken the dancing girl under his protection, so possibly the lover of Nicolo is not far off! Beware of any stray beauty whom you may meet. This one is named 'Agathe, the Serpent!' and with a Greek father, and an Armenian mother, has been so happily born as to inherit all the vices and none of the virtues.

"Van Lennep writes me that she has been playing the lady at the 'Grand Hotel Huck.' It might be well for you to seek other quarters if Bouclair really 'rules the roost' there. Van Lennep will point out to you every dangerous face.

"But keep shy on him in public, and look out for

Bouclair and Nicolo, for your life, and my future is in your own hands. Don't fail to write to my sister Lavinia and to Lily. They are strangely anxious about your venture.

"Our whole opening campaign rests on Jack Masterson's getting aboard the 'Alessandro Cornaro.' I have written him to the British consul at Trieste that he shall be set up for life (with Mary thrown in) if he gets shipped on that steamer with no suspicion. Every consul in the Mediterranean and Levant will forward any tip that he can give us.

"As for you, command me in any thing. Don't forget to play the ignoramus as to foreign tongues."

"Well, one part of your injunctions I will follow!" laughed Howard Vinton. "I shall studiously correspond with the ladies at Southsea."

The launch soon swept alongside the "Apollo," and the first officer, cap in hand, escorted the "Milor Inglese" to one of the two superb cabins sacred to the traveling "aristocracy." From the very moment of his arrival, Vinton tried to forget his German, French, Spanish and Italian. He schooled his tell-tale face as he wandered over the spacious saloons, now littered up with all the effects of twenty-five first-class passengers of both sexes.

Seated at the end of a long dining-table he penned his telegrams to Captain Drage, to Chief Stoker Jack Masterson, and to "the Child."

In an hour, the legation launch had swept away with its precious freight, a brief business report to the captain, and a letter which tenderly answered the communication in which Lily Arnot expressed her delight at the tokens from Paris.

"You shall and must succeed," she had naively said, "for Uncle Enos' very last words as he departed were that he could deny you nothing if you succeed. So I leave the choice of your reward to you. But you must come back to Southsea to claim it!"

The five-pound note which Vinton gave the Dragoman confirmed that haughty official's idea of the lofti-

ness of the traveler's rank. He had not failed to visit each and every officer of the ship and informed them that a distinguished Effendi, a friend of the Ambassador, one who spoke nothing but his own tongue, was in their hands.

And chief steward and "controleur," made haste to assign to the milord, room and table attendants who spoke a fair "steamship" English.

Only the turning of the great screw dispelled the fleet of caiques, launches and hotel boats hovering there around the "Apollo."

Howard Vinton sat alone at the stern of the steamer and watched the matchless picture fade away behind him in the blue and gold of the sunset. Mosque-enriched Stamboul, Pera, with its stern Genoese tower, Galata, where rags and jewels, luxury and starvation jostle each other, far away lines of gorgeous palaces, with the Bosporus whispering at their marble steps, and Scutari, with its huge cypress groves shading the English dead. The "Apollo" swept on past Seraglio Point, where a half-submerged steamer still lay on the fanged rocks, below the last of the ramparts, once held by the brave Constantine Paleogus!

Gray and green,—pearl and gold,—dark ilex clumps, and shining silver domes, rose above the broken walls, where the cross went down at last before the crescent!

And on, out on the heaving bosom of the Sea of Marmora, the "Apollo" sped into the summer night. A single white star was hanging over the silver cone of Olympus as the last crimson rays dried up on its penciled summit.

The breeze of Asia drew freshly over the sea, and still Howard Vinton sat, watching the bubbling wake, his eyes fixed upon the spot where the bow of the sunken steamship showed black and red against the wall of the Seraglio. "Perhaps they are lurking even here—the banded agents of 'Komanos and Company!'" as he rose and went down to the saloon for the table d'hote dinner.

In the "sociale halle," at the head of the companion-way, the list of first-class passengers was already framed for the benefit of the customs authorities of Smyrna. The "controleur" had proudly flourished off "Excellence Howard Vinton, English Embassy, Constantinople."

While the American paused in amusement, a sudden chill ran over him, as he gazed idly at the names following his own. He read: "Monsieur Emile Bouclair, Smyrna;" "Monsieur le Captaine Dimitri Nicolo, Scio," and "Madame Agathe Mitis." He slowly entered the cabin, ushered in grand state, to a seat by the side of the captain. He then cast his eyes around the four tables.

There was a busy laughing circle already chattering to the merry sound of popping corks. A dozen languages were mingled in a discordant chorus. The haughty reserve of a suddenly created "Excellence" now preserved Howard Vinton from self-betrayal. The bearded captain's groan of regret, "I spik not ze Engleesh," was received in silence with a deep bow.

The quick-eyed American had noted the card at his left, and the fact of two seats of honor vacant opposite. It was not hard for him to divine the identity of the trio who followed him, for the captain effusively saluted them in exuberant Italian.

"Komanos and Company," was Vinton's lightning thought. "She has found the fugitive lover," and, gazing furtively at the splendid woman with oblique, lustrous eyes and willowy form, he knew her rightly named, "Agathe the Serpent!"

CHAPTER IV

AT SMYRNA!—IN THE GRAND HOTEL HUCK!—THE WILES OF AGATHE THE SERPENT.

Howard Vinton took refuge in an almost morose gravity of demeanor as the safest protection against his dangerous neighbors. There was a long gap in the double ended table, and the merry ship's doctor was presiding at the other end over an assemblage of a half dozen stars of the Cirque Giuletti, which annually stirs up the "four hundred of Smyrna" and maketh the shallow social whirlpool to boil like a pot. There was an easy abandon in the saloon, where each traveler furtively watched his neighbor.

Vinton dared not even to "size up" the three pickets of the enemy "Lead us not into temptation!" he muttered, as he was now conscious that Agathe the Serpent was intently regarding him out of the corners of her darkened velvet eyes.

A glance told him that the self-possessed man at his left was the dreaded Bouclair, and that Dimitri Nicolo was at the side of the siren for whom he had wielded the assassin's knife!

The hiatus of nearly half the table showed that the captain was "in the house of his friends." The service a l' Italienne gayly proceeded, the table being well dotted with flasks of Chianti, Lagrima Christi, dark Cyprus; and a Cognac and vodki stand, told also of Russian tastes.

Howard Vinton assumed the stolid Briton, and calmly ignored the sprightly table courtesies of the Levant.

"'I will live up to my blue china,' as far as Smyrna," he mused. "I am a lord, at any rate, for this trip!"

By the time the circus ladies were playfully throwing bits of bread at the jolly doctor, and the wine-flasks were half-emptied, and the sounds from the other tables were distinctly Bacchanalian, Vinton saw the

drift of the many little taps at the door of his cave of retreat. He bowed in grave negation to the successive demands of all his agreeable neighbors. "Parlate Italiani," "Sprechen sie Deutsche," "Parlez vous Francais," and "Habla V Espanol," all seemed to merely daze him.

"Dragnets!" he thought, as the good-humored captain whispered to Agathe, "An English lord, immensely rich; he came on board in the embassy launch! The Dragoman himself put him on board. A milor Inglese on his world travels!"

There were eight keen eyes watching the expression of Howard Vinton's impassive face. "I think that I can give them the 'cold hand' and the 'marble heart,' he decided, as he solemnly picked out his dinner, with the aid of the English speaking steward behind him.

"Thank God I have erased every mark from my luggage, and all my papers are safe in the wallet around my neck!" pondered Vinton. "The captain is an easy-going comrade, and my stateroom might be ingeniously explored."

He reserved a detailed examination of the faces of the crafty three until he had at least half pistol range, to disguise the throbbing of his pulses.

The Sea of Marmora had narrowed, its low islands, with their white rocks, shining out on the darkening blue, were now veiled in evening shades, and Stamboul was lost above the bend as the swift "Apollo" swung her prow south and west, to reach the Dardanelles and glide into the romance-haunted Archipelago.

Vinton noted the sparing use of wines by his dangerous neighbors, but, the jolly captain was no teetotaller. He grew a bit hospitable and a bit inquisitive, as he emptied his assorted glasses.

"Come up after dinner and let us have a friendly game in my cabin, Dimitri. Bring the Madame!" the mariner cried, with a frankly expressive side glance. "Is your old trouble all settled?" Dimitri Nicolo laughed gayly. "Emile straightened that out as soon as Rustem Pasha came back. They had

hunted for me, but at Kastro, every Lemniote is my brother. We all hate these Turkish brutes. I had timely warning of a search party, and so, I skipped to Odessa."

Howard Vinton calmly turned to the steward behind him, speaking in English, "Be sure and wake me at the Dardanelles. I want to see the ship pass the Strait!"

"All right, milord!" responded the eager servant. "We reach Chanak at daybreak, and halt there half an hour."

"Where do you put up at Smyrna?" cried the gay captain to Nicolo. "I must send the Madame some fruit ashore! I have the whole pick of the Constantinople gardens on board."

"Come and take breakfast with us at the 'Hotel Huck' then!" replied Nicolo, shaking his dark, handsome head in the direction of Bouclair. "If I am not there, Emile and the Madame will do the honors!" He laughed till the gold ear-rings in his ears danced and trembled. "My ship will be in the harbor in a week!"

Howard Vinton plunged his regards into his black coffee. "What is she like?" demanded Beberovich. "Bouclair picked her up at Trieste! He bought her, I only sail her! I'm told that she takes a stunning cargo. Five thousand tons dead weight!" Dimitri Nicolo proceeded to burn the cognac for his black coffee.

"What's her name, Emile?" said the captain. "Oh! you know her very well, the old 'Alessandro Cornaro'" said Bouclair, with a meaning glance which was lost on Captain Beberovich. The commander roared, "Well! That old four-master! It's an even race—if her masts will go overboard first or her engines through the bottom first!"

"You are mistaken!" decidedly replied the Frenchman. "She is just coming out of dock at Trieste, almost entirely rebuilt, and McGregor has refitted her engines!" "Who owns her?" persisted the steamer

captain. "Fifty of us are in the deal for five hundred pounds apiece!" cautiously said Emile Bouclair. "Don't you want a couple of shares?"

The bluff sailor laughed. "Not if Dimitri sails her, and old Sandy McGregor runs her engines! You had strangely bad luck last time. I'd sooner spend my money on Agathe there—at least I would know where it went to!"

The tall American calmly rose and then sauntered out of the saloon unconscious, as if he had no interest in the world save watching the great "Apollo" now throbbing along on an even keel, between the deeper blue of the star-lit sea and the spangled cobalt vault of the Eastern skies.

His firm, manly tread echoed on the deck long after the motley horde of the deck passengers forward were all sleeping like logs piled up, al fresco.

Pilgrims, dervishes, bashi bazouks, Russian devotees, greasy Jews, gaudy Greeks, smug Italians, bold Dalmatians and crafty Armenians were all muddled together in a polyglot mass.

The shouts and yells from the saloon smoking-room told of the gay throng who battled with fortune over the cards. The lazy sailors lolled on watch at 'fo'ksal, bridge and stern, while the sound of wassail echoed also from the captain's splendid private cabin.

There was the clink of glasses, the strumming of a guitar, the sound of a risqué song, and once, as Vinton passed, he had a glimpse of Agathe executing a pirouette, glass in hand, her lithe form swaying under the wine excited passions of the moment.

"The woman seems to be the go-between! Decidedly 'Komanos and Company' is a very social institution. We are all now converging to that interesting focal point, Smyrna. I shall have my eye on Madame Agathe, the beautiful serpent."

As it struck eight bells for midnight, Howard Vinton turned in, to be in readiness for his daybreak tryst with the "Dardanelles!" "Thank heavens! I've located the principal villains! After a conference with

Jack Masterson I fancy that I will cable Enos Drage to move nearer, at least as far as Athens. They have a big scheme on hand, and the woman must have gone off in search of this corsair captain, Nicolo. So far they have not dropped upon me!"

Howard Vinton was in error! For in the splendid stateroom opposite to him, Agathe the Serpent was already dreaming of the cold, haughty young stranger. "He is not so bad looking—an English milord, young, handsome, and rich! He shall speak to me before to-morrow night! I have never failed yet! For he, too, will surely go to the Hotel Huck."

She laughed merrily as she thought how she could outwit the trio still drinking and gaming in the captain's snuggery

"They know not that I speak English, and so I can fool even that tiger Bouclair. As for my Dimitri, bah! he is a child!"

A year on an English tramp steamer from Batoum to London, with a China run, and a long, homeward voyage by Australia, had given to Agathe Mitis a very fair knowledge of a tongue to which the corsair captain and his convict partner were both strangers.

"To travel with a milor, ah! quel voyage en Orient!" the saucy beauty murmured ere she slept, and—she builded castles in Spain.

While the "Apollo" ran in toward the scarped banks of the Dardanelles, under a late moon, two men were seated on the quarter deck of the "Alessandro Cornaro," now moored to a buoy off the Lazaretto, in the great basin at Trieste. With pipe and mug, they were making merry.

"How are your fires, Jack?" said a huge, overgrown, red-bearded Englishman of fifty-five. "Remember, we run out on the morning tide! The First will be off at three o'clock with the last of the crew! And, a rum lot they are!"

"I can have steam in an hour," answered Masterson.

"Better turn in and take a snooze, Jack!" said McGregor. "I'm in charge, you see. We'll get our new

captain, 'Dimitri Nicolo,' at Smyrna. I had a telegram three hours ago that he would join us there. They want us to hurry on. I'll smash the old thing through now, for all she's worth!"

"What's our cargo, Chief?" demanded Masterson, with easy carelessness.

"Smyrna goods for London, if we ever get there!" laughed Sandy McGregor, as he refilled his glass. "This boat will load the heaviest cargo that ever left Smyrna, and far the most valuable. We've taken dunnage enough aboard to load her chock up to the Plimsoll line!"

"I'm glad of that!" lazily said Masterson, "and it's kind of you to help an old shipmate, for I want to work back to Plymouth! I've a girl there I must see, and I want to have a few shots in the locker. Is our money all sure?"

"God bless my soul!" roared McGregor, we've got 'Komanos and Company' behind us, and they are as good as the Bank of England. Many's the good hundred pound tip old Schnorr has given me, down at Cadogan Building, Bishopsgate!"

"Why, they must be a rich partnership!" drawled Masterson.

"They are everybody in the Levant who chips in!" proudly declared Sandy McGregor, now well on toward his own "maximum load!"

"I saw that duffer Bouclair draw on Schnorr, by Reuter's telegraph agency, for fifty thousand pounds last time I was under their flag. I always got my own private orders by telegraph at Reuters, 25 Old Jewry, London, and for years, I could go in to the Agence Havas, 8 Place de la Bourse, Paris, and tap Bouclair any time for a thousand francs by wire.

"They've always got a job for Sandy McGregor! Now, who would else have taken this old tub but me, and stiffened her up to stand a couple of good round voyages! And I have 'hornswoggled' the insurance inspection certificates out of these fellows here with a few 'five hundred lire' presents!"

Jack Masterson was reflectively smoking. "Is the ship well insured?" he casually asked.

"Bless you!" roared Sandy, "as soon as the inspection certificates reach Smyrna, Bouclair will plaster these Greek and Austrian companies with thirty thousand pounds on the ship! I am to get him the rating! A hundred pounds of red lead, zinc paint, and another hundred in presents easily did the business. She looks now like a new boat!"

"Boat ahoy!" cried a stentorian voice, as a cutter swept alongside, and a lithe Italian sprang up the companion way. "Hello, Skipper!" bawled McGregor.

"Are you all ready for the voyage?" hastily demanded the acting captain.

"Aye, aye, sir!" cried Sandy, slowly struggling to his feet.

"Then I'll send ashore for the barges now to bring the crew right alongside, and we'll run out at once. I've got our 'pratique' all signed, and we must hasten to Smyrna. I had another telegram to-night."

"I'll go, captain, with your message, if you will send the boat off. I left my own heavy kit ashore."

"Very good!" said the Italian, "but hasten back!"

"Sandy, you can start my men in at the fires! I'll be back in half an hour," said Jack Masterson, as he ran down and jumped into the cutter.

He made good his word, for he ran like a hunted deer from the landing, doubling like a hare, till he roused up his secret go-between—the agent of Lloyds of London!

"Here is my last dispatch to Captain Enos!" breathlessly cried Jack Masterson. "Take it down, and telegraph it at once to Malta! We are off in an hour!" and so Jack quickly condensed all of McGregor's babbling into good sailors' English.

"Keep my secret!" he cried. "These fellows would knife me and heave me over in a minute, if they suspected!" Without another word, Masterson dashed

back to the quay where the cutter was already awaiting him.

A wheezy tug was dragging along a barge with twenty dark forms huddled therein, seated up on their wretched bundles. In the star-lit night the huge, ungainly bulk of the "Alessandro Cornaro" rose up high in the air, her red sides ten feet out of water.

A high fok'sal built in the bow, four enormous masts with huge swinging derricks, a bridge and house forward and a high built poop, made up as ugly an old colossus as ever foundered in the inky darkness of an Atlantic midnight.

"Here goes, old skull and cross bones!" gayly cried Jack Masterson, as he donned his jersey and descended to the engine-room. Honest Jack felt a pang in betraying the sociable old chief engineer, but the solid attractions of buxom Mary Horton rose up before his eyes in their substantial charms!

"Full fires now, Jack! Bear a hand!" cried McGregor, every inch a sailor, drunk or sober. "The 'old man' has ordered all the steam we can give her, and so go ahead! You've got a dozen as villainous scoundrels as ever danced on the end of a rope. Remember! You, the two engineers and I make up our own cabin mess, and 'Komanos and Company' give us the best. Take it out of your men! They're used to it, and will only like you all the better!"

Jack Masterson told off his gang from the chattering mass on the forward deck. Lascars, Maltese, Cingalese, a couple of forçats, and two fugitives from justice in ten minutes were shoveling coal, half naked, on the dead equality of misery and debauchery.

The shipping master had put his own driver aboard, and at four o'clock the great "Cornaro" lazily swung down past the slopes of the "Triestener Karst," out into the gulf. A few lights blinking in the Theresienstadt, the Josefstadt and the Franzenstadt told of late revels, midnight vigils, or early misery as the old freighter lumbered along on the greasy waters.

Jack Masterson stole up to take a last peep at the

black-walled old town, with its castle and crumbling cathedral on the hill, and the modern splendors of the Corso, and the beautiful new town.

In the lazarette basin, sixty great ocean steamers were now at anchor, and the smoke curled lazily up from the tall chimneys of the ship works, the huge soap works and rope walks. The vast lead works and leather factories were deserted, and from the barracks, no Austrian bugle sang.

Pacing the deck, watching the dawn pointing over the Julian Alps, as the waters turned from black to lead color, and the stars faded out in the west, Jack Masterson gave his pipe a fresh load, as he surveyed the ragamuffin crew.

"Stole away, like a thief in the night, with a cargo of nothing, on a ship nobody owns, and with a crew of unhung scoundrels! A jolly old commencement, but,—the music will be coming on at Smyrna!"

Jack Masterson crawled below to watch his energetic slave driver goading on the poor brutes who toil by the month to gain the drunken license and frenzied forgetfulness of a day!

"If there's a hell on earth, it's the stoke hole of a tramp steamer!" said philosophical Jack, as he joined Sandy McGregor in the morning cocktail! Old Tergestum, a prize of worth to the fierce Illyrians, long before London was first mud walled, now lay far astern!

The strange old town where Jupiter's temple carries the golden cross to-day, and empire has displayed its storied eagle from the days of great Augustus, down to lion-hearted Maria Theresa, and the poor faded and feeble Franz Joseph! Sandy McGregor was laughing heartily over his glass.

"The skipper took time by the forelock!" he cried. "If the port authorities had seen this outfit, we would never have even catted the anchor! But, 'Komanos and Company' have long fingers! The old coffin is really making twelve knots!"

"It's a rum old voyage!" laughed Jack Masterson.

"Well! It won't last long after we get our load at Smyrna!" grinned Sandy McGregor, as he waddled to the engine room.

"I'll give these fellows their orders, Jack! Take a look at them every half hour, and, I'll turn in till noon! I only want you to keep them from blowing the ship up, and—your beauties down below there, from knifing each other! You can take it as easy as you like!"

"What a shame!" mused Jack Masterson, as he stole away to his room, and strapped on his knife and revolver. "There goes the best chief engineer of the Peninsular and Oriental—just what rum has made him!"

On the quarter deck, Tomas Corvini, acting captain of the great tramp, mournfully eyed the distant Apennines to the southwest, for there at Ancona, was hidden the woman whom he loved, with all an Italian's jealous frenzy, and for whose sake, he roved the Mediterranean, a licensed pirate, and the fit adjutant of Captain Dimitri Nicolo.

"I'll be glad to turn the old rattle box over to Dimitri. Thank Heavens! He's back at Smyrna, and he'll be all right when he gets away from that snake-eyed witch Agathe!"

Mr. Howard Vinton was a light sleeper, and he sprang up, as the steward of the "Apollo" loudly clattered at his bolted door. "Dardanelles in half an hour, sir!" was the summons which brought him out into the cool and freshening dawn. There was only the drowsy deck watch at hand as the American sought the lonely upper deck. With a bird-like sweep the "Apollo" was swiftly gliding on, aided by a six-knot current between the narrowing purpled hills, throwing black shadows into the glassy water.

Two great white lights ahead showed where Asia and Europe now almost touched hands! The masthead lights of three Turkish guardboats shone out in yellowish twinkles.

The European hills rose up sharply crested and towering high above, as the "Apollo" ran around the

point and then entered the narrowed canal! The Asian shore showed a great square antique masonry castle, and as the dawn began to glimmer, Vinton noted battery after battery, these armed with the black grinning Krupps!

The engine bells then clanged loudly, and the great ship drew up motionless, while swinging lights flashed signals from the Turkish guard frigates! The rise of dawn soon lit up the far hills and showed Kilid Bahr, with its triple square crenelated Genoese tower, and the straggling city dreaming amid the deep cypress groves of the western shore! There was a low plain to the east, with a pulseless river shining gray in the growing dawn.

Far away along its banks stretched little sleeping hamlets, and, trooping along over an antique bridge, lazy herd of camels came down to drink, in the cool freshness of the breaking day.

Then flashed out long lines of circular tents, and a single wild bugle shrilly sang the Turkish reveille at a heavy isolated work. Across the waters from the huge casemated batteries of Chanak, the martial music sweetly floated, taken up soon, echoing from camp to camp, till all the straits rang again.

Listlessly the red flag with its white crescent and star was dragged up to the pole on the old keep, where the pious crusaders had guarded the cross in olden days.

Bands of red-fezzed soldiery now swarmed out around the interminable batteries clearly visible, and, in the light changing from rose to yellow and bright golden, the blue waters, the graceful palm-fringed shores, and the exquisite oriental landscape stole upon the gaze of the delighted watcher. With lightly dipping oars, a guardboat floated toward them, and dozens of little canoes swarmed out, clustering around the great liner.

The two hundred polyglot deck passengers were now in a wild chorus, trafficking for all the dainties which the chattering peddlers conveyed to them by

baskets hoisted up, when the glittering piastres had first been lowered.

And, to the north and south, came on the steamships of all nations now in the growing light, to humbly lie in line, and lower their flags in a mute pleading to the bloody Turk, to be allowed to pass scatheless, the guns paid for by monies borrowed from the Christian English. The impregnable batteries rose up tier on tier and the waiting line of vessels proved the degradation of Europe.

First, in column, was a superb Russian steamer, its merchant flag of white, blue and red humbly lowered with the blazoned double-headed eagle doing homage to the hated crescent.

"All this for gain, for mere profit," mused Vinton. "By Jove! It's as sneaking a trick as Komanos and Company could play."—He had drawn back into a little recess between the vast smoke stacks.

The sound of voices arrested his attention. The official boat was just rowing away, and the screw commenced slowly to revolve as the "Apollo's" prow pointed down the channel for its peaceful running of the gauntlet.

In an instant, Vinton had recognized Nicolo and his guiding spirit Bouclair.

"Did you get your letters here?" asked the Greek sailor. "Yes!" replied Bouclair. "Mustapha will be able to manage a quarter of our cargo—that's a help."

"I want to load in the upper bay, Emile!" earnestly said the captain, speaking softly in Italian. "You see you can take no chances! For, some of the boxes or barrels might break. If that cursed Van Lennep should find it out, I would lose all."

"Mort de Dieu! I will have him killed, if he bothers us!" growled Bouclair. "Yes, you had better lie well up the bay. The Salonique people will give us a good quarter of our stuff. I want to make this a big run! We may not have another chance so soon! The light barges can get up there, and you can move down

a little as your load goes in! Five thousand tons will make a great deal of clatter in the bazaars."

"Have you all the Smyrna cargo ready?" asked the Greek. "I can give it all to you in a month. We will have the last meeting of the company as soon as these goods from up here are on board."

"Where?" was the captain's question. "Oh! at the 'Hotel Huck.' Of course I'll give a big dinner to the Port officials, and we can all gather and talk it over in my rooms. You are safer coming to see me there. Van Lennep will watch you," said Bouclair.

"You know he will. It's only by having Agathe stay at the hotel that you can have a good excuse to see me there in her own rooms, every day."

There was a quick start and Nicolo began hotly cursing and protesting.

Howard Vinton stirred uneasily in his place of concealment as Bouclair sternly said, "You jealous fool! The woman's necessary to me now. Van Lennep has his sharp eye on all of us after the last close shave. Only the killing of Robinson destroyed the proof! I've got to insure that cargo for sixty-five thousand pounds. We are playing for a fortune, and thirty or thirty-five thousand on the ship.

"Now, if Agathe were staying on the ship, you would be only a bewitched fool. She is the only one who can safely rally all our people. And stay there near to me, she shall!"

"Never! Never!" sharply cried the love-crazed captain.

Then, Emile Bouclair's voice rang out like a whiplash, "I'll take the ship away from you! Forfeit your share in the run, and let Corvini do the job. The woman is no mate for a poor man! Better go down and ask her yourself! She will only laugh at you."

There was a growling altercation, and then a dead silence followed, for Dimitri Nicolo had sullenly yielded at last and fled away discomfited.

"So, even rogues can fall out, it seems! The old

story. One woman and two men. And—Venus decides, at last, as usual in favor of the heavier purse."

With an anxiously beating heart, Howard Vinton stole away unperceived to his cabin. "I think that I will now mentally photograph these two precious ones," he ruminated, as he carefully dressed and laid out his imposing series of Eastern guide books. "I will have an important budget ready for Enos Drage, on my arrival at Smyrna. And there, too, I must play my part with some little nerve, for one unlucky step would bring about either my death, or else the balking of Enos Drage's secret quest."

The stake to be played for—"ninety thousand pounds"—was a brilliant one, and Howard Vinton puzzled his brain to know just what jugglery "Komanos and Company" proposed to employ.

"One thing seems certain," he said to himself as he approached the grand saloon, "I must never speak to Van Lennep, unless I am safe in the British Consulate, and then, only in Fitzgerald's private rooms. One of us, or both, might be soon made the prey of Bouclair."

Vinton was dimly conscious of a graceful presence, as he passed through the narrow companionway. The passage was dark, and as he stepped politely back, a musical voice whispered, "Excuse me, my Lord!"

He had lifted his hat and murmured an unintelligible reply before he saw, as he seated himself at table, that the fair speaker was none other than Madame Agathe Mitis.

The chief steward gravely served the woman, to whom Howard Vinton had merely bowed in silence, upon taking his seat.

The captain's nod was his sole greeting, and the two quarreling rogues had not yet appeared.

After a general inventory of the passengers straggling in, Vinton turned his glances toward Madame Agathe. Her own piercing gaze was now fixed upon him with a peculiar timid softness, an invitation, an entreaty, the suggestion of a secret!

And, when it flashed over him that she had addressed him in excellent English, his heart beat wildly. "Here is my one foe—my greatest danger—this fascinating beauty."

Howard Vinton had noted the cat-like swaying tread of the dancer, and he was free to glance at this dangerous charmer as she bent her swan-like neck toward the gallant captain.

"I suppose that those two angry rascals are having it out on deck," mused the American. "Evidently the sailor here is making hay while the sun shines!" For the classic head with its coils of blue black hair gracefully leaned toward the ardent mariner.

Agathe Mitis was in the very flush of Levantine beauty at twenty-three. Tall and lithe, her easy movements as she swayed toward her gallant, told of the sinuous muscles of the dancer, moulded in Greek form.

Her hands and arms were a sculptor's model, and the small nobly poised head was as graceful as any goddess of the weird days before great Pan died. Rich budding coral lips vied with the deepening roses on her cheeks and her replies as the sailor murmured in the flowing Italian told of her morning of young Life and Love.

The veiling lashes were long and silken, and as she stole a glance at "Milor," Vinton started at the strangely ophidian effect of her oblique eyes, with their restless burning pupils. He longed to be alone, for he needed to take counsel of himself.

In a few moments Captain Dimitri Nicolo strode into the saloon, his red silk sash giving him a bandit air.

Thirty years of age, well knit, sun-browned, with crisp curling black mustache and a mat of clustering hair, the pure olive and faultless outlines of his classic face told of the true heirship of the degenerate Greek blood, the faultless body without a soul.

His brown, finely formed hands were disfigured with the sailor's blue tattooed star, and the golden rings

danced in his ears as he broke in upon Agathe's tete-a-tete.

The woman blanched and, casting down her eyes, listened as he whispered in a fierce low monotone.

"Just the kind of a chap to leap over the quarter of a becalmed yacht with a knife in his teeth, at the head of a swarm of scoundrels!" mused Vinton. "Bold, fearless, reckless, and born in the fierce Lesbian breezes blowing from Mitylene's accursed shores."

There was a stolid, ugly look on Emile Bouclair's face as he sullenly seated himself at Howard Vinton's side.

With a frightened look, Agathe Mitis glided out of the cabin as she saw the two men scowling at each other in silence. "The kestrel leaves the hawks to fight it out alone," was Vinton's amused verdict, as he profoundly bowed to the Captain, and rising, strutted around the spacious saloon.

He could well observe the rounded shoulders and bent form of sturdy Emile Bouclair. The head was round and slightly bald, the jaw coarse and heavy, the lips pendulous and full, and his long strong arms were those of the strangler.

Discreetly clad, quiet and bland, the escaped forçat had the jaded air of one who has been bowed down for years under brutal restraint. The neck and hands were burned a mahogany red, Guiana's true climatic mark, and the cold, round, crafty gray eyes told of one who knew well how to wait. Running easily from Italian into French, Bouclair's typical shrug and air of blase wickedness spoke his origin in the slums of a great French city.

"The head to plan, the hand to execute," thought Vinton, as he gathered his books for a day on deck. "Gare le corbeau!

"There is a fellow to begin a quarrel with, by—just killing him at first."

Alone on deck, stretched out in a great Japanese wicker chair, Howard Vinton dreamed ominously of the coming struggle.

The ship sped swiftly on out of the shaded bluffs where old Troy once stood, to unmask the smiling blue Aegean with all the glowing islands of the Archipelago rising up, in graceful hovering outlines.

He knew them all, Lemnos,—fair Strati; Imbros and Tenedos, wind swept in the channel, and fair Mitylene, famous for its "innocenti pocula Lesbii," the rich draught that Horace loved, and, even yet, infamous for its withering vices and blasting crimes, done in the name of Eros.

He could hear the flute-like voice of Agathe as she lingered in the enamored Captain's bridge house, and his pulses bounded as her low laughter floated out on the balmy air.

Away, at the prow, as the "Apollo" rushed over the sapphire flood, sending a huge triangular wake behind, two manly figures were seen in vigorous gesticulation, as Nicolo and Bouclair "had it out!"

Vinton was startled at this dropping into the very thick of the enemy.

"These sharp scoundrels will be too much for Van Lennep and myself!" he mused. "They have friends in every port. I can not openly strike back. Van Lennep is surely doomed, if he actively quarrels with them. They were evidently up here to meet their secret confederates, by appointment.

"The Turkish officials can aid them, with giving an official sanction to their movements. I must call Enos Drage as near me as possible—and—at once! The 'Alessandro Cornaro' will be on hand at Smyrna in a couple of days at most!

"Sixty-five thousand pounds on the cargo—thirty-five thousand on the ship. It is only this well-bred scoundrel Bouclair who can handle such a vast scheme. Local help, even Dimitri Nicolo's villainy, and Sandy McGregor's crafty underhanded skill, are useless, all unless Komanos and Company craftily cover the tracks.

"There's Jack Masterson to watch the cargo and the ship's movements, Van Lennep to spy upon these two

fellows at Smyrna, and Enos Drage to follow them up, and marshal Lloyds' avenging forces,—while I—will be penned up in the Grand Hotel Huck, with the hardest task of all—to fight in silence—and to play a waiting game, with my life in my hand."

The young American laughed as he compared the personal attractions of Bouclair and Dimitri Nicolo. "The young Greek captain has fifteen years of youth—his lover's passion—and the strain of the wild blood in him, to draw this woman close to him. He has also risked his life for her.

"They both need Bouclair! He is the veiled Mokanna of this forty thieves conspiracy. Madame Agathe will surely obey the cold Frenchman's sullen demands. She is now his familiar spirit, but, she will steal away later and betray Bouclair to the lustrous-eyed Greek. At the last, she would go where her stormy blood would call her, to the arms of her chosen lover. A drugged cup, a wicked stab, the first felucca, and then,—ho! for the caves of Kastro!

"For once the 'Alessandro Cornaro' has made its mysterious run, with its rich cargo; Dimitri Nicolo will be enriched. If the storm breaks on anyone's head, it will be Monsieur Emile Bouclair who is betrayed!"

Howard Vinton wandered over the ship and watched the blue islands slowly receding. "I will be among a nice gang at the Grand Hotel Huck," he ruminated. "My stay will be as safe as sleeping on a charged mine. I will call Captain Drage at once, over to Athens.

"And, at a pinch, he can secretly get into Smyrna and hide on a British war ship, or at the Consulate.

"If the 'Cornaro' starts from London, he can easily reach there a week in advance, by Constantinople, head the vessel off, and then secretly cable to the Insurance authorities, that is, if she ever gets there. I suppose that Nicolo, Bouclair and old McGregor will pick out an easy place to lay her bones.

"Do they mean to simply wreck her, or to scuttle her and then hide all evidence of the fraud?"

The presumed "Milord" was followed all over the steamer by the obsequious attendants. In vain he sought the seclusion of his own cabin.

As he entered it, he saw the fair face of Agathe Mitis, in half hiding at her own door. He was startled when she smiled, and laid a rosy finger upon her lip.

"Here's a devil of a new complication!" angrily cried the disturbed American as he bolted his own door. He glared out of the porthole in silence. "I'll go forward and chum with the motley deck voyagers," he grumbled. As he turned, something fell from the opened ventilator of his room.

He stooped and picked it up, for a spray of myrtle and a rose with a twisted paper fell at his feet. He had seen the gallant captain of the "Apollo" hand the same flowers to Agathe that very morning, but the twisted paper was all her own.

He read: "Come to the Hotel Huck. Do not speak to me here. It would be dangerous! I will find a way to meet you there. Beware of everyone, and watch over your room."

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish!" the youngster wrathfully decided as he hurled the note out of the porthole, torn into little bits.

But, on second thought, he placed the rose in a carafe of water in his rack. With a calm face he passed out upon deck and sought the color panorama of the main deck.

He was not vain enough to imagine he had made an "impression de voyage." He felt assured that Agathe the Serpent was no mere meddler.

"I know what I'll do. I'll go direct to the English Consulate, and deposit all my papers there, sealed up in the safe, and I'll get me a servant, too, from Fitzgerald, a man to stay night and day, in my rooms. Lloyds can foot the extra bill.

"They have become suspicious of me! Perhaps they saw me this morning in my involuntary eaves-dropping."

Howard Vinton was not well versed enough yet in

the crafty crimes of the Levant to know that Captain Beberovich had excited the professional curiosity of Dimitri Nicolo.

For, the easy-going sailor had told the rogues of the splendor of the young English Lord's arrival on the boat, "personally conducted" by the sacred Legation flag.

Over the love-inspiring Cyprus the Greek had whispered to Emile Bouclair a very neat scheme.

"These young fools are always rich—rich to a marvel! He will go blundering around Smyrna, and poking over the old castles,—the Lake,—Homer's grotto—and wandering far into the interior.

"I can get a half dozen good Greek fellows," laughed Dimitri, "to carry him off, and, we can then hold him for a great ransom. A night's run in a felucca would land him in the hands of the bandits behind Athens."

Emile Bouclair whispered, in his thick voice, "Better still, if Agathe can indulge in a little flirtation, we can ransack his rooms and so find out all about him first. If he has a great banker's credit, we could lure him away, and force him to sign it, then—fix him like Robinson!"

It was the cold brutality of this suggestion which caused Agathe Mitis, with only a wayward woman's reason, to warn the young English Lord.

"They would kill him!" she murmured, that night while Howard Vinton dreamed of the blue-eyed "Child." "He is young, and—not bad looking! He shall not be trapped like a dog!"

And, so the beautiful stool-pigeon of Komanos and Company led on by Fate, strangely decided to shield the secret enemy of the man she loved—for the mere vague reason of a light woman's passing fancy.

And, open-eyed, mistrusting nothing but the offered amourette of a dancing girl, Howard Vinton strolled among his fellow voyagers as the far-away point of Smyrna Bay loomed up to the east.

He forgot the stern struggle awaiting him, as at noon, a line of turbaned and shaven Dervishes, squat-

ted on their prayer carpets, intoned the prayers ordained by Mahomed, led on by a green-turbaned Mollah, whose voice quivered as he led the chorus.

In beards and rags, across the ship a dozen Russian pilgrims from Kief, piously crossed themselves, and chanted their devotions on their way to Jerusalem. Zaptiehs, Arabs, beggars, squalid women and half-naked children swarmed, while the circus animals sent up a din from below. Lascars, Coolies, Malays, Maltese, Greek brigands in starched skirts and broidered jackets, grave Turks in red fez and single-breasted frocks, glared at each other in a forced amity

On the main hatch, a great tent was lifted of shawls and richly colored striped fabrics. Rugs and cushions, matresses and silken pillows were covered with veiled women, in a voluptuous abandon.

A leaden-eyed old Pasha, his blue coat starred with silver war medals, smoked his nargileh amid the crowd of women, guards, eunuchs, babies and pet sheep, guiding all with a word, and bearing an air of infinite patience. Baskets of fruit, sweetmeats, musical instruments, jars of spring water, pots of flowers, parasols, umbrellas, little coffers and large red trunks made a fortification, behind which the soldiers promptly kicked off anyone approaching the sacred harem tent, loading them with fierce curses.

Jars of wine, the old Greek amphorae, were not lacking, and the veiled beauties lazily puffed the cigarette, held in their henna dyed fingers. The five harem beauties coddled each other's babies, and an endless luncheon of bread, cheese, fruit, honey and preserves was going on all the while.

Several old women shrouded in black, watched the five beauties whose hands were decked with silver rings, turquoise set, and wearing golden circlets with diamonds.

"Domestic felicity à la Haroun al Raschid!" smiled Vinton, picking his way back to the quarter deck.

The near approach to Smyrna brought out at last a pale-faced Russian princess, whose one finical French

maid, two robust nurses in Muscovite dress, and a dandified Nubian negro page bespoke her opulence.

The saloon passengers were all scattered about in excited groups, preparing for the inflictions of landing, and a dozen Jews and Armenian merchants were noisily gambling in the smoking room as Howard Vinton descended to his luncheon.

In the cushioned half-circle of the "Ladies' Social," the American saw Captain Dimitri Nicolo, eagerly pleading with the lady of the serpent eyes, whose lovely face was averted as Vinton descended the stair.

But, through an open window the Yankee saw Emile Bouclair gazing at the loving pair with a cold malignity which made him shudder.

"How I would like to turn my old Winchester Express loose on you, you pattern rascal," mused Vinton, with the instinctive aversion of a man for a human beast. And yet he brushed elbows with the man who was now calmly plotting his murder—for the mere greed of gold—to rob a traveler's purse!

"I am surely in the mysterious Orient now," said the astounded American as he looked around his stateroom. "Is it a well-meant warning?" he whispered as he noted two beautiful red roses, where he had left but one. "Some one has been here! Can it be that she would dare?"

He strove to read the meaning of the two red roses. It then flashed across his mind that red was the oriental emblem of death by violence. The two roses. The two villains,—would be murderers! "I will outwit these scoundrels," he swore. "This is a warning, —and—from a passionate woman's heart, and sent by her kindly hand!"

He discussed his solitary meal in silence, only gazed at by Emile Bouclair, who enjoyed his meal with all the calm deliberation of a Parisian gourmet.

"A sort of cross between an escaped swindler,—an unfrocked priest, and a broken-down actor!" decided the American, as he mentally photographed Bouclair. And Victor Hugo's description of the eyes of the piti-

less "devil-fish," "le pieuvre," returned to Vinton. He was conscious now that the ex-convict, and veteran commercial fraud was watching even his slightest motion.

It suited Howard Vinton to run directly under the guns of the enemy. He was brave with the self-reliance of youth. "I will give these two scoundrels a fighting show," he decided. "I may force them to come out of their shells. Perhaps a Colt's 41 cartridge —long,—may stop some neat little stroke for this galley slave." There was but one on board who could verify the disgrace of Bouclair.

It was the lustrous-eyed woman who had seen the scar of the deep-red letters T. F. so well burned into the brawny shoulders, that a dozen powder flashes did not sear out the mark of the "distinguished consideration" of the French government, for Emile Bouclair's abilities in forgery,—fraud, embezzlement, false papers and financial deviltry.

It was near sunset before the steamer captain parted with Madame Agathe and Nicolo who had riotously breakfasted in the official quarters with the enamored sailor. Howard Vinton's modest kit was ready for landing, as the "Apollo" gracefully turned to the east and then swept into the glorious bay of Smyrna.

A huge red modern earth-work with six great Krupps on a point to the south, was soon left astern and the high brown mountains rose up on three sides with the blue haze and vegetation making a vast background of blue and gold.

The long, flat mole, the great Customs' landings with the blood-red crescent flag showed before them, with Smyrna rising in its amphitheater to where the gaunt old castellated fortress hung over them upon Mons Pagus.

There were a dozen steamers already moored out to the north, with clouds of boats hovering around them. Across the sapphire bay beautiful villages clustered to the east and north, and, from the overcrowded ferry-

boats, the music of Tzigane bands floated out upon the sparkling sea.

There was the stately mole, running three miles to the east, in an unbroken line, with all the cafes and pleasure gardens, open to the cool northern breeze.

Under the forefoot of the steamer, a splendid lateen cutter raced along. Its graceful sail was hovering like a bird's wing over the thirty-five foot hull. Stem and stern were painted bright blue, the sail was striped red and white, the hull green, banded with one-third its depth of white.

The crew, in gay Greek jackets, with red fez and sashes, were as picturesque corsairs, as the fleet cutter skimmed away.

"That's my tip. I'll hire a boat like this. With one staunch fellow, I'll defy these fellows to get my scalp, without a run and a fight for it."

The great liner slowly drew up, swung around, and then fired a gun for pratique.

Perfectly composed and on his guard now, Howard Vinton watched the dozen boats with consular colors, and the awning-covered barges of the competing hotels nearing them. The familiar ensigns of "Cook" and "Gaze" soon appeared, and then his eyes fell upon the giant sign "Grand Hotel Huck," painted across a four-story mansion on the quay, with its outhanging galleries, facing the bay. Not five minutes after the insolent Turks, scimetar at side, had straggled up the gangway, the steam launch of the British Consulate raced alongside.

And, then, Howard Vinton paid the price of greatness. The cavasse, silver knobbed stick in hand, mounted the deck. In a grave silence he presented a note to the handsome "Milor," who was now the envy of the passengers.

For, the "Laissez-passer" of the English Ambassador had caused a great commotion. There was a huge battle ship, and a racing-looking cruiser, with a saucy corvette lying at a cable's length, and, over them, flew the undefeated flag of Nelson.

"It's something to be an 'English Lord,' after all," thought Howard Vinton, as he went below to tip the servants.

For, the earthquakes which threw down the old Ionian city on the Meles, the wars of Antigonus and Lysimachus, the Roman sword or the bloody Turkish scimetar have never affected the outstretched hand. The horseleech has sons as well as daughters, from the remotest antiquity. Howard Vinton had noted the absence of the two warning roses in his deserted room, but there was left in their place an abundance of myrtle and a sprig of forget-me-not!

He hid these little emblems, and turned to go. As he did, a soft, burning hand caught his own.

"Remember," the soft, sweet voice whispered. "Watch, for your very life! We shall meet!" and, with a swift rustle of drapery, the graceful gliding form vanished.

He mounted to the deck with a fluttering heart, and gazed out upon the vast tiers of stone houses, the far-sweeping hills, the great, silent cypress groves of the dead among the living. The anxious passengers hung over the side and vigorously cursed the calm-faced man who departed, with much Turkish salaaming. His luggage was cabalistically franked. As the curtained launch sped away, he turned his head.

Already he knew the graceful form of Agathe the Serpent, and one slender hand waved a kerchief as he gazed. The touch of the landing electrified him, for he was now on his battle ground. Leaping into the carriage, in ten minutes he was safe in the private rooms of the British Consulate.

A door opened, and a cheery voice exclaimed: "You are on British soil here, my boy,—and,—here is Van Lennep with letters and telegrams."

The two men had hardly shaken hands before Vinton poured out his story. "Ah! Then!" cried Van Lennep: "It is a fight for your life, now!"

CHAPTER V

THE RICHEST CARGO OF THE LEVANT!—IN THE OLD CASTLE!

The anxious-eyed agent Adolph Van Lennep gazed silently in the eyes of the British Consul as the young American told his brief story.

"Hold on! I have it!" cried the grave-faced Consul. "The carriage is still in front. I'll send Sergeant Foley down with our young friend to engage his rooms and to leave his own luggage there. Foley can also have a room there en suite, and play secretary and factotum to 'His Lordship.' So, we will have one of us always there to watch Komanos and Company.

"Gad! My Boy! You brought the head devils all along with you. Leave all your private papers here. You've nothing but linen, clothes and personal articles in your valises. Foley will engage rooms, register you, and then return with you here for our dinner. We must not let them think for a single moment that you are on your guard."

And so, before Howard Vinton saw aught of his new friends, save that Van Lennep was a deep-eyed, bearded German of middle age, sad and watchful in his manner, and that Maurice Fitzgerald was a rosy, cheery-looking Briton, he was leisurely rolling along the scene of Smyrna's nightly schemes, feasts and love intrigues—the wild Vanity Fair of the long quai.

The chattering Turkish porters were just beginning to arrive with the goods of the passengers still penned in the Customs yards, when Howard Vinton was ushered into a splendid double set of rooms on the north front. "The very best in the house," said the obsequious Head Porter, proud of his English fluency.

"Quite retired. No one near you, but Monsieur Bouclair, who has the corner suite of three rooms, 'en permanence,'—and, at your left you have the gallery, for fresh air, and the evening coolness."

The horses of the Consul General of Her British Majesty were already prancing before the door as Vinton descended, ready for his dinner. The watchful Foley whispered: "You've left nothing, Sir, that would interest anyone else. You know what all Oriental servants are."

"Not a thing!" smiled Vinton, startled, for the dark witching face of Agathe Mitis was now before him. She held in her hand two rich, red roses, and, at the head of the stair suddenly turned and pressed them to her lips!

At the foot, Monsieur Emile Bouclair and Captain Dimitri Nicolo were being loudly welcomed home by a half dozen magnates of the great social center of European Smyrna.

"The birds are in the nest—and—the snare is set," gayly hummed Vinton as they trotted briskly back to the dinner table waiting the suddenly promoted "Milor."

"Who is Foley?" the American queried, between his soup and fish.

"Oh!" laughed the Consul. "He is our 'D'Artagnan,' a sort of a general utility hero who was formerly a brave sergeant of marines and was badly wounded at Alexandria. He needs a mild, dry climate. He is the typical warrant officer, cool, brave, steady and has only one enemy, the Irishman's foe,—the bottle! But, he's a fair clerk, a good sportsman, and he is up to every Levantine dodge!"

"Just my man!" cried Vinton. "I want him to get me one of these Greek boats, and so I can keep away from the gossips by knocking around the bay and the nearest islands."

Fitzgerald laughed. "Foley's cutter, the 'Eros,' is the prettiest thing in the archipelago. He knows every inch of the shore from the Dardanelles to Athens, and as far down as Rhodes and Candia. I've a couple of my extra men who are his crew, and I often send them over to Scio, with dispatches, for boats that don't stop here. So, hoist your admiral's flag, when you wish to."

Before the dinner was over, Adolph Van Lennep and Vinton were in an easy accord.

"Now, gentlemen," said Fitzgerald, "I've the minister's orders to obey you blindly, as to sending out all your communications. The committee of Lloyds has cabled to me, as well as Secretary Hozier of Lloyds, now on his yacht 'Conqueror,' at Malta. I will leave you when the dinner is over to your first work. I will always send your dispatches in my official cipher, and my sealed mail bags are at your service. I can alrcady see by the hubbub among the merchants and the insurance brokers that some big venture is contemplated.

"The purchase of the 'Cornaro' is known on the exchanges here. The crafty head devils are gathering in. It is for you to watch and trap them. Let me warn you that the Turkish officials, high and low, are hand and glove with these fellows, but they all deal with Bouclair only as a confidential fellow.

"You, Mr. Vinton, can make yourself privately known to the American Consul and tell him you will veil your 'Herald' relations under the guise of an English gentleman of leisure. I will sustain that character for you!

"But, you and my friend Van Lennep here must never be seen together in public, as intimates. I will vary the day of our dining here by messages through Foley, and each of you can come alone here as you will. You had better knock about town for two or three days, Vinton, on the usual sight seeing. Foley, well armed, will accompany you, and I will give you my carriage and cavasse, if you go out to the environs.

"When you run over the railway to Bournabat and Aiden, I will conduct you myself. I will see that you are invited on the British warships. But, I cannot attempt to aid you in your quest, without betraying myself, and so, perhaps, defeating you.

"It is clear that you should summon Captain Drage to come over to Athens at once, and wait for events there. There are twenty chances a week to run over

to Athens, and, either you, Foley or Van Lennep could slip away from here unnoticed.

"If he came here, his rank would of course make him a guest on the fleet, and, the London Committee write me that Drage has never made a stay at Smyrna. That's one good thing. They will surely load this ship with a rush, on her arrival. My chief clerk tells me that there are forty barges already loaded with cargo here, and we have made out over a hundred consular invoices already.

"I can watch, and can post you—but the whole Turkish gang, from governing Pasha down—are hand and glove with Bouclair. Of course, as to papers and inspection, the Moslems will go 'it blind' for Bouclair."

"Then, it would be useless to try and interfere with them openly here?" said Howard Vinton.

"Perfectly!" said Fitzgerald, rising and leading the way to the smoking room. "They will be sure to have a customs guard of Turks on board the ship,—the Moslem bargemen have zaptiehs on board their lighters, and you'll find that there's not a man on the 'Cornaro' not of their gang.

"No! It will be a stern chase—and a long one! You can only gain all the facts, and, let Captain Drage find a pretext for official British action, or the seizure of the ship. The whole Moslem system is rotten with backsheesh and villainy from the Seraskierate, and the Sublime Porte, down to the meanest official!"

"And," said Van Lennep, "as to our young friend's life at the Hotel? We don't want him to run against Robinson's fate. They will not harm me,—until after the big deal is pulled off safely, at any rate," said the sad-eyed German.

"Mr. Vinton must eat only at the public table d' hote. Foley will have my secret orders. I will send sealed bottles of mineral waters to your rooms. And, wines from my cellar for safety. You must never touch your lips to a single thing not served at the public table d' hote. I will put your name up to-day at the Eng-

lish Club. It's only a few doors away. And, never go a moment out at night without Foley.

"Another thing!" smiled Fitzgerald. "It's all well enough to enter the respectable pleasure gardens along the quai with a friend. But, beware of sweet Fatima's eyes! There is absolutely no redress in the East for social imprudence. The public conscience is curiously callous. I can officially certify Smyrna to be the very worst town in the world, morally! The point of this warning lies in the application of it. All your mail and communications will be handed to you by me, and never touch a pen except here! Van Lennep's office is foreign ground to you—shun it!

"Make not a single acquaintance here, save through my own confidential introduction. The halo of the English Lord, 'en mufti,' will be a great safeguard to you. As for your sleeping, Foley will fit the hotel doors with chains and Chubb locks, and so he can guarantee the inviolability of your rooms. Not a scrap of paper do you sign save here. And,—you, Mr. Vinton, must absolutely seem to ignore the 'Alessandro Cornaro,' and everyone aboard of her.

"You are sufficiently warned as to Bouclair and his gang. Beware of them! I shall secretly verify your health and presence, and I shall have something private to say to the good widow Huck as to your comfort. She has to ignore the deviltry carried on in the best hotel in Asia Minor."

It was half an hour after Consul Fitzgerald had left them, before the two champions of Lloyds had decided upon their telegram to "Shun Lee" Drage, and Van Lennep had gone over the secret report of Jack Masterson.

Adolph Van Lennep then summed up their joint decisions. "I'll go and send the telegrams. You can send for Foley and arrange for your boating excursions, and 'doing the lions.' It is clear that Nicolo will be pinned down to the 'Cornaro.' She will be here in three days. In a week Captain Drage can be at Athens. The business of Komanos and Company will

engross Bouclair by day, and at night, he and his friends will make merry near you with Agathe and her sister sirens.

"You can meet the engineer 'Jack Masterson' in secret at the Scottish Arms, and I can follow the progress of the cargo brokerage,—insurance schemes, and we will be ready to act. There's but one danger imminent now: Don't be led into any secret meeting with the dashing Agathe. For I've an idea that both Nicolo and Bouclair will dog her movements. Jealousy is the most peculiar ferocity of Levantine intrigue!"

Howard Vinton smiled. He possessed a talisman, now resting on his heart, in Lily Arnot's dispatch welcoming him to Smyrna, and the last cabled instructions of Enos Drage had roused him like a trumpet call.

Sergeant Foley's merry eyes danced with joy when Vinton ordered out the "Eros" for the morrow, and, after Van Lennep had privately slipped away, the socially promoted American waited for the official carriage to ostentatiously convey him back to the Hotel Huck.

"It is a swell thing to be an English Lord—even 'en amateur,'" laughed Vinton, when Fitzgerald gravely objected to allowing "His Lordship" to proceed to the Hotel without due ceremony.

"Tell me, Consul!" demanded the American, "how did a fellow like this Bouclair ever get such a foothold here?"

"It's only a story of Turkish cupidity," said the Consul, as he lay back enjoying a last chibouque.

"Eight years ago a gang of very clever International forgers operated in London, Paris, Hamburg, Berlin and Constantinople. They were headed by a desperate fellow named Chapman, who had a beautiful wife in London. As an artist engraver, they depended upon 'Bader the Dutchman,' a gifted scoundrel with a dozen aliases who had been run out of Europe, into America, and then—back again, by England, to the Orient. Their neatest job was victimizing the Ottoman Bank at Constantinople out of forty thousand pounds.

"Some sneak thief had purloined some blank official drafts of the English Minister. It was found later that a Queen's messenger had cashed a small Legation draft at the Credit Lyonnais Agence in Galata. 'Dutch Bader's' work was so well done that it even deceived the Foreign Office, and was duly paid—the fraud only being detected later on the arrival of the ambassador's monthly summary of official disbursements.

"This cool fellow Emile Bouclair was then in hiding in Constantinople. He had once been a man of some prominence in Parisian business circles, and he probably had obtained a hold on some French employe of the Credit Lyonnais, for the draft was presented through the Credit Lyonnais by Bouclair, who had escaped from Guiana.

"The whole gang then came on here to Smyrna and were finally nabbed here. There was no legal evidence to hold Bouclair, but the unlucky Chapman and his friends were all sentenced to ten years in the English prison at Constantinople. Three of them escaped by connivance, but Chapman was too heavily ironed.

"The scoundrels went to England and blackmailed the devoted wife of Chapman, who gave them all moderate sums and sent them off to South America. She had received the proceeds at Stamboul and reached London in safety with the bulk of the funds. Bouclair gained the poor prisoner Chapman's confidence, and through the Turkish officials saw him daily in his prison. He then lured the poor, fond woman over here under pretense of buying Chapman's liberty.

"Up there in the dark, lonely, cypress cemetery—she sleeps to-day, dying suddenly while Bouclair was supposed to be away at Scutari. And—there was no golden treasure found in her poor effects! She had turned as black as ebony after drinking some coffee prepared by a servant of Bouclair's who disappeared.

"Now, Chapman was duly interrogated, for a minor confederate cried 'Haro!' The distracted man denounced Bouclair and then divulged the whole plan. The betrayed prisoner was shot while trying to escape.

"Emile Bouclair only laughed at the prisoner's wild ravings, and so he returned here vindicated, to become later on, a prime favorite of the governing Pasha. The Bankers' Association of America,—Scotland Yard,—the Bourse authorities of Paris,—Berlin,—Amsterdam and Frankfort then grimly hunted the fleeing criminals down, one by one. And this cur Bouclair has gone on, from easy comfort to open insolence!

"There is no power to verify his identity with the escaped French forçat—for, naturally he sails under a changed name, and a skillfully disguised appearance. It is significant that all his intimates here are Greeks, Jews, Armenians and Turks.

"I once conducted a secret 'personal inquiry.' A Scotland Yard man came out here. We could not, however, connect this dangerous fellow with any of his English crimes, and so the cowardly robber who betrayed his poor confederate is free of all but Turkish control.

"He operates in business through others here, and the signature 'Komanos and Company' wielded by him alone, probably represents some fifty of the smartest scoundrels in the Levant. He seems to be impregnable to fate."

When Howard Vinton drove down, along the quai, a double line of promenaders already extended along the garish frontage of the gay pleasure gardens.

Out on the moon-lit bay flitting white sails gleamed, and the sparkling stars hung dreamily over the great ruined keep on Mons Pagus.

Crowds thronged all the al fresco enclosures, where already, across the rows of round tables with the merry drinkers, could be seen saltimbanque and painted artiste doing their weary "turn" to amuse the heavy-eyed revelers. Hoarse yells and all the frantic outcry of an Asiatic summer night resounded in the side streets.

Sin laughed and ogled its prey under its painted mask,—the Greek cutthroat and Turkish prowler slunk along craftily in the shadows, and the great anchored

ships loomed up black on the stagnant waters of the bay.

Hundreds of graceful boats glided along, the spearsmen ready to strike the foolish fish rising to the light, and the clatter of the street peddlers of sweets and lemonade arose in its harsh chorus, "Orea! Orea!"

Sergeant Foley gazed in an amused interest at Howard Vinton, who muttered, "Bedlam let loose!" "Here's your best friend in Smyrna at night, Your Honor!" cried Foley, tapping the butt of his heavy Adams revolver.

There was a crowd of filthy beggars, a swarm of laquais de place, and a dozen officers' servants gathered around the Consul's carriage as Howard Vinton ascended to his rooms.

"My secretary will attend to all my wishes. He speaks the languages," remarked Vinton haughtily, as the maitre d'hotel aired his fragmentary English.

It was already a balmy season, and Vinton sat silent up in the airy balcony of his apartment, his head throbbing with all the excitements of the day.

As the moon silvered the swelling waters of the bay below, a voice rose up almost at his very side, in a passionate strain.

It was Agathe the Serpent, tired of castanet and tambourine, who chanted "Si vous n' avez rien a me dire!" Shouts of applause, and the clash of glasses followed as the concealed singer struck the last chords of the accompaniment.

"They are truly making a night of it," mused Vinton, as he sought his rest, and then, the careful Foley, examining both apartments, displayed a store of Harvey's club soda, bottled claret, and carefully took post in the outer room, his revolver and night lamp at hand.

The American pilgrim started up in the darkness as the singer, resting her voice, played the "Last Rose of Summer" with a meaning emphasis—was it a hidden message, a secret warning against uncanny grim specters of the night?

He had carefully examined all the walls. They were solid, and the windows, too, were clear of helps to an escalade. His own trusty "Colt" was under his pillow, and he fell asleep at last in the vain effort to follow the rich melting chords of Tom Moore's exquisite song.

He was haunted in his dreams by a vision of the beautiful Agathe, her ophidian eyes glowing with a soft fire as she stood with her curved lips pressing the roses which she had stolen back, their mute message delivered. Her voice whispered again, "Remember! Watch for your very life! We shall meet soon!"

And, in his uneasy dreams, he saw the gray-eyed Bouclair stealing upon the poor convict's wife, the woman who died to set her guilty husband free—by the witchery of the stolen gold!

And, then, two gentle blue English eyes shone down in Love's glamour upon his dreams. He forgot the glowing rose of the poisonous orient, his lips murmured, "Wait! Lily! Wait!"—and, in his dreams, he walked with her again where the beautiful Isle of Wight hovers far over the Solent, beyond the pleasure walk of the Marine Parade!

Tinkling camel bells sounding below his window, a chorus of afrites and a general reveille of deviltry brought Howard Vinton to his feet at early dawn. The old soldier was already astir, and much marveled the Italian waiters at the English lord's frugal breakfast, for they judged all mankind from a kitchen standpoint. "Now about our sail!" cried the impatient Vinton.

"Easy as rolling off a log, sir," said Foley. "We take the first carryall ready here, for my boat's moored to the quay a half-mile up! I'll give you then a freshener spin in the 'Eros,' and you can take a dive overboard, and I'll land you here later at the very door of the Grand Hotel Huck. To-night I'll buoy her off the front here and have two men sleep on board of her. We can run down the bay then when your big

tramp steamer is signaled from the fort, and so get a first good look at her."

There were twenty nationalities astir in the brisk morning air when Howard Vinton returned from his first double tack across Smyrna Bay.

The sea breeze had blown away all the haunting dreams of the first night in Asia, and he was in a capitally good humor as he strolled along the main city front. His dash overboard had brought out all the elasticity of his rigid Anglo-Saxon muscles, and so he calmly contemplated a flaring yellow affiche on the walls.

"Quick Dispatch for London! Merchants' Line!—The A1 iron steamship 'Alessandro Cornaro.' Nicolo, Master (6,000 tons register), will have quick dispatch for London, direct, via Malta and Gibraltar. For freight or passage apply to

"Komanos and Company, Consignees.

"Emile Bouclair, Agent.

"Immeuble Photiades.

"Will discharge at London Docks."

"Well! These fellows certainly do not hide their light under a bushel!" mused Vinton, calmly, igniting his first morning cheroot. "What in Halifax are they up to? Do they wish to run off with a rich cargo and make a fraudulent bankruptcy—or do 'the barratry act?' Perhaps it will turn out a strange case of shipwreck. They must be fearless chaps. Here they are, out in open daylight, and their plans are surely already made up. Ours, alas! are yet in nubibus! But—the stern chase may finally tell the whole story! Oh for Jack Masterson!"

It was with a flutter of curiosity that Howard Vinton strolled along into the "Scottish Arms," where, already, before noon, the lazy "off-duty" men of a dozen foreign ships were lounging and drinking.

Sandy McPherson, a battered old sea dog, in fez and bawling in a half-dozen languages all rolled up

into one jargon, was loudly prating of the voyage of the "Cornaro," as Vinton drained a modest B. and S.

"It's something to brag on in a port as has three thousand vessels a year going 'outward!' This 'Cornaro' will take out the very richest cargo as ever left Smyrna! Nigh onto a hundred thousand pounds in value! The 'Merchants' Line' will soon carry the banner! It'll take the stevedores a month to put five thousand tons on her! But it makes money flush here in Smyrna!"

"What flag is she under?" asked a lounger, over his mug of Bass.

"Greek, of course. 'Komanos and Company!'" answered Sandy, with an expressive wink. And Vinton strolled out as they all laughed. "That sly fellow gets all the loose money of the old countrymen coming over here," said Foley, "and besides, he does a lively bit of smuggling."

"Who loads these ships?" demanded the American. "The crew are all turned ashore for a run—only the officers, cooks and watchmen stay on board! These Moslem chaps put her cargo in chock up to the hatches and seal 'em up! You see the Christians won't work under the Mussulmans' orders here, and neither will they obey the Giaours! The Turkish authorities always make a good thing of it, and so they have it all their own way. They have their own easy habits, and just knock off for prayers, or a chibouque whenever they feel lazy—and, that's most always.

"The smart Greeks and Armenians live by swindling, while the other Europeans here are on special jobs, and besides, the foreign crews couldn't stand up to the sweltering weather here. The bloody Turk is bound to have his own way, anyhow."

And when they reached the Hotel Huck, Howard Vinton found the Consul's carriage waiting.

"I'll have the rooms all snug when you come back from luncheon, sir!" cried Foley, touching his hat in military style. "And then I'll just lay around here, for points, and do a quiet bit of locksmithing. You

must give me some dummy work to do to fool the servants."

The Consular carriage driver had his orders to show the lordly visitor all the bizarre panorama of mart and arcaded street, vast interiors piled with the riches of Anatolia, Bagdad and Persia; the crowded bazaars where the noisy multitude chaffered; the cool mosques with their entrances chained up to warn away the unbeliever; all the hospital, church, walled harem enclosures, tier on tier of houses steeped in the fierce glowing sunlight, and all the varied chattering bustle of busy mole and the vast basin where the great ships lay packed together like sardines, their bowsprits rising high over the thronged roadways below.

A hundred costumes—fifty different tribal insignia—all the color medley of the splendid East; donkeys, goats, Arab chargers, hoarse babbling camels, and dashing equipages poured pell-mell along the stony pavements.

Crowds of lazy soldiery lingered on quay and mole and patient porters groaned under bale, barrel and bundle.

Innumerable peddlers and squalid beggars thronged the streets, where in the shade the glazed-eyed Moslem droned over the hubble bubble, and waited patiently upon Allah.

Money changers' stands were met at every corner, and from the latticed windows above, pale-faced women, shrouded in muddy blue cotton and half-covered by the treacherous white veils, lingered there in a sad-eyed listlessness.

Mr. Howard Vinton was most ceremonial in making his toilet to meet the American Consul, and the fitful dreams of the night returned to vex him when he drove away from the Hotel Huck.

For, from a window above, deeply curtained, a freshly culled rose fell into his carriage. At the corner he raised his eyes and saw the cautious flutter of a white hand.

"Angel or devil—she is on the watch!" mused Vin-

ton, as he drove away to secretly meet the American Consul in the safe haven of Fitzgerald's hospitable home.

He had agreed with the British official and Van Lennep that the American official should be genially hoodwinked in order to save the important interests of the friends now coming into the arena with Komanos and Company to struggle for a fortune—perhaps even life.

Howard Vinton's eyes were now fairly well opened to the desperate scheme.

"They probably mean to clear as a nefarious profit in some way the whole gross value of the vessel and its cargo! And this golden ninety thousand pounds is a tidy sum!" mused the American. "I will 'confidentially' unfold myself to the American representative here as a secret 'Correspondent of the New York Herald.' In this way I can use him, when necessary.

"But, for convenience, he shall know that I have assumed the character of a 'British aristocrat,' so as to travel without let or hindrance, throughout all the Turkish dominions." The fortunate provision of the "Laissez passer" from Constantinople served to back up Vinton's story when the two gentlemen lingered after the host Fitzgerald had driven out for his airing.

"You have done well," laughed Major Willis, an old war veteran, who enjoyed the dreamy repose of the American sinecure Consulate. "You will be free, Vinton, to go and come unchallenged, as long as you keep up your well-chosen masquerade.

"For, the fierce Turks are ferociously jealous about Armenia, and all the internecine troubles here. They despise all unnecessary writing, and hence our good missionaries are sharp thorns in their sides, with their good natured zeal in saving souls that are not burning for salvation. And—the missionaries really burden the mails.

"I'll be glad, of course, to quietly entertain you. But, keep away from my office. Come to the English Club, meet me here, or at my residence; but you must

avoid me in public. I will send out all your Herald mail and press dispatches, under my official frank.

"You have done wisely to choose British protection, for fear alone rules the Turk. That's what makes the shadow of the English flag an oasis of absolute safety!"

He led Howard Vinton to the window and showed him the three great English war vessels, with the "meteor flag of England" proudly drooping at the mizzen.

"Keep up your masquerade, your 'laissez passer' is good for the interior as well as the coast, and you can go unchallenged where an American correspondent would be baffled, insulted, turned back, or even imprisoned. We see about one of our war vessels in a year, here and there, but for a week. Old England keeps a strong fleet within striking distance always, and I have found in fifteen years of world wandering, that twenty-five per cent of our protection abroad comes from the volunteer police of the seas, by stout old England, God bless her!"

And so Vinton was "squared" with his national official, and the hidden campaign was covered up. He was keeping faith with Drage in this innocent deception. He was saving Van Lennep, also; but, in concealing his romantic secret connection with Agathe the Serpent,—Howard Vinton felt that he was veiling the strange secret of a woman's heart.

"She is, after all, a woman," he sighed, "even if soiled and fallen, and so I will not unfold her tender moods to these social agnostics, Van Lennep and Fitzgerald. For she may choose to indulge in the pastime of guarding an innocent stranger from the drag net of these Smyrna thugs."

He arranged with the consul to have all his possible newspaper communication handled by Willis, who gravely said: "There's twenty-five millions of Christian capital and five thousand dwellers here always in danger of any sudden Turkish storm of fury. Germany, Russia, France, Italy and England have a secret

understanding that the nearest fleet shall always support the united foreign consuls.

"Bennett was wise to send you out here. Smyrna is the greatest port of the Levant, and from here you can strike out quickly and at once reach the center of the storm disturbance.

"Meanwhile, drift quietly on your oars, and let me kill a bit of time with you. I will arrange with Fitzgerald, and we will divide the pleasant labor of showing you our local lions.

"Our private residences are always open to you—for we most rigorously exclude all the 'shady' citizens from our homes. We are perfectly safe in the consular private circle. But our open offices are continually haunted by the scum of the earth. Smyrna is a nest of robbers."

Howard Vinton found a pleasure in reporting to Paris his arrival at Smyrna, and he at once wrote to editor Walton to send all his mail to the American Consul, sealed, and marked "Official Business."

And so when reaching the Hotel Huck he felt that he was now fairly ready for the coming game of wits, and armed at all points. Sergeant Foley had arranged his private locks and bolts and a neat English-speaking "garcon" was on detail to answer the bell.

"We've nothing to do now but to browse about on the bay and watch for your big tramp boat. There's a blessing about blue water, it leaves no trail behind the keel.

"The two boat-tenders are on hand, and—there's the 'Eros' now, moored under our very window."

In the cool afternoon, Howard Vinton lounged on the upper portico, proudly "breaking in" his chibouque, testing Foley's well cooled Bass' ale, and watching the interminable shiftings of the color panorama of Smyrna's great quay.

"We will 'take in' all the gardens and open-air theaters to-night, you and I," said Vinton, "and you can show me all the respectable ones! I want to write up this strange Levantine life—al fresco. Also, get me all

the books which tell of the strange mishaps of this vast human hive five times born out of war or earthquake wreck."

Foley was a bit of a student, and he babbled on of the olden days of the Eolian city, of its Ionian successor,—of the days of Homer, and the "Homereum"—of the Lydian tyrants' sack and waste, of the splendid "New Smyrna" of Antigonus, of the legends of the Seven Churches, and the good meek Polycarp.

The old castle above them told of the days of the vanished Genoese chivalry, the splendid era of the Middle Ages, and the blue bay still showed the grove where Coeur de Leon once pitched his warrior tent in haughty pride. The twenty mosques, and the dismantled old fortress of Mons Pagus, spoke of the fierce Mohammedan swordsmen who hewed down cross and cross-bearer, and planted the cosmopolitan Devil's Auction of the Smyrna of to-day on the graves of Christian knight and slaughtered believer.

While Howard Vinton swept with his glass the blue bay far out to the far hovering horizon of the gulf in search of the great four-master, there was a ruddy-faced Briton fuming in a towering rage, on the steps of the Hotel Dunsford, at far away La Valette.

Captain Enos Drage was mopping his conical head with a huge red silk handkerchief, as he gazed down at the point of St. Elmo. He had driven away the banded hotel porters in a fierce ebullition of wrath.

"No Athens steamer for four days," he growled, "and, by Jove! I should be now on the spot, to help that game young fellow! Here's Vinton telegraphing, and Jack Masterson, too, may have a vitally important report! The 'Cornaro' will reach Smyrna to-morrow. I wonder if I could get a boat, a yacht, or something? It is horrible!"

He glowered over the vast fortifications, down across the "Hog's Back," to where a splendid white three-masted steam yacht lay in the basin, with the Royal Yacht Club burgee floating at her mizzen. He had chafed in his enforced delay and had run over all

the five quarters of the city, had hunted up his old garrison and club friends, roamed over the island, done the lions of the place, the Governor's palace, the Cathedral of St. John, the caverns of the ghastly dead and dried monks, and had most liberally dispatched sundry gifts of coral and filagree to the sister he loved, as well as "The Child," who had written him a fervent letter, begging him "to join Howard Vinton, and—watch over him!"

Drage angrily turned. A burly jolly-faced Briton in tweeds and a pith had rudely disturbed "Shun Lee" Drage at his meditations by jostling him.

"Beg pardon! Good Gad! If it's not my old friend Drage!" cried the new-comer. "What are you doing out here?" But "Shun Lee" only stood bewildered.

"Hozier here! Well, I'll be shot if this isn't luck! I thought I knew her rig! Is that the Lloyds' yacht 'Conqueror?' "

"Yes, old fellow! Come and take a cruise," heartily cried Colonel Angus Hozier, the general secretary of Lloyds' Association.

"Where are you stopping?" sharply cried Drage. "I've the most important business for you—and I need your boat?"

"Over at the Grand—come to breakfast! Here's my carriage," hospitably answered the second official of the great insurance league.

While they rattled along over the inclined causeways in a diabolical little trap, Drage jolted out his portentous secret, in concise fashion.

"Ah! This is grave news indeed!" said Hozier. "If you can break up that gang, my boy, your fortune is made forever. I'll send my man down on this trap to signal the boat, and we can have steam up and be off in three hours. I'll run you over to Athens, and send the boat back to you, from Salonique.

"I'm going on a month's hunt in Roumelia. With the 'Conqueror' you can dodge around, run into Scio, and then you can send it over to Smyrna, or, if these fellows try the old gigantic fraud business, you can

reach Stamboul in thirty hours, London in three days more, and so head them off on their arrival!"

The two men discussed their breakfast, while Hozier made his own hurried plans for departure. "We can drive by, get your traps, and then make a break, as soon as I see the 'blue peter' flying at the foremast of the 'Conqueror.'"

"I'm all right, now," joyously cried Enos Drage, as he threw down his knife and fork. "I will outwit or baffle those fellows, if I live."

"Enos, my friend," said the secretary, "I want you not to strike them—too soon. It will take them some little time to get in their cargo and plaster on their insurances!

"Let them fool along—you can easily watch them, get the whole game, and let them run into the trap! Don't flurry them! I want them to spend all the good money they will, for premiums, for bottomry, and expenses! Keep the yacht! You can dodge about—chase them over here to Malta! I'll go and see the Governor!

"We will have that steamer followed day by day to London Docks! I give you carte-blanche to run them down and expose the fraud! We will make them sick of it, and later blacklist every name on the policies.

"If you get the evidence—I'll go up from Salonique then and see our ambassador. We will trace out the Turkish scoundrels working with them, and afterwards make a clean sweep of the port officials of the pachalik of Smyrna!

"And every London agent, insurance broker and confederate shall be chased off 'change.' You know, the chief inspectorship is vacant."

"I'll follow the 'Alessandro Cornaro' to Iceland, but I'll show those villains up!" cried stern old Enos Drage.

"Here, send off this cipher telegram for me, through the Governor! You go to him! I'll meet you at the dock! The Consul at Smyrna will notify me at Ath-

ens, and here's another to my secret agent! We will soon have full reports on our arrival!"

The two men separated, and before sunset the beautiful 'Conqueror' was hull down, on the course to Athens, gliding along at seventeen miles an hour.

That night, while Howard Vinton listened to the riot of pleasure's saturnalia in Emile Bouclair's rooms, he smiled in a grim defiance! "With the Minister and Lloyds' agent at Constantinople, Drage at Athens, Jack Masterson, Van Lennep and I here, we have got 'Komanos and Company' neatly sewed up! They celebrate too early in the game!"

Vinton had received the news of Captain Drage's flitting, and he fell asleep, to awake from troubled dreams with a start, for the song had died away, and the jeweled fingers of Agathe Mitis were waking the strains of the "Last Rose of Summer" again.

"It is Nicolo's last night ashore!" thought the American. "The 'Cornaro' will arrive to-morrow. Then the Serpent may, perhaps, have a leisure moment! Does she mean that I must remember?"

And he fell asleep, determined to spend the next day on the bay and see the giant tramp steamer steam into the bay. "I will give her a safe chance to tell me the burden of her warning!" he muttered, as the music died away at last.

Morning came smiling over the Bos Dagh, the golden sunbeams driving away the mists of night and gilding the blue islands, hovering far out in the sapphire seas whence the foam-born Venus sprang. No hardy fisher, Suliote or Moslem, was earlier on the deep than Howard Vinton, who had decided to run far out beyond Vourla, and watch for the great four-master.

"This is something like life, Sergeant," cried Vinton, his hair streaming out in the fresh morning breeze. "Your 'Eros' is a racer!"

The good sergeant grinned as he held the tiller, the boat quivering as she raced along under the lift of the huge brown lateen sail.

A sturdy old stranded British tar held the sheet, while Vinton swept the varied shores and far reaching blue zone with his signal glasses.

The gossips of Smyrna had already decided that "Milor," the social recluse, was a haughty islander, who only deigned to visit "Her British Majesty's Consul," or else the swell officers of the fleet.

The fact that the young nobleman was traveling incognito, and only spoke English, explained his escorted tour of the village studded shores where a refined culture glowed at classic Philadelphia, two thousand years before the sober children of William Penn planted its drowsy namesake on the forest-fringed shores of the Schuylkill, in the New World.

The only companions "the lord" deigned to notice were the British and American Consuls.

"A walker, a sportsman, a yachtsman, a water dog, a world wanderer," said a gossiping Italian who watched the "Eros" flitting around the head of Smyrna Bay. Howard Vinton's cautious avoidance of new acquaintances was explained by his "lofty rank."

Even at the English Club, the two Consuls refrained from "showing off their lion." And quickly the effete hollow-eyed absinthe drinkers of the Hotel Huck's cafe decided that Vinton was only an aristocratic athlete and globe trotter.

A superficial report (by the bribed servants) as to Milord's personal outfitting confirmed a suspicion of literary tastes, for the apartment was now littered up with Vinton's guide books, the Consul's local library, and "Secretary Foley" was careful to leave some loose sheets of a "Memoir upon Polycarp's Martyrdom," to catch the passing eye. Photographs of the old temple columns, the castle, the stadium, and the local scenes of interest gave an air of "studious refinement" to the rooms.

Already there was some murmuring among the gay soubrettes, dancing girls, and all the sirens of the fifty pleasure haunts that the young "Milord" was far too

ascetic for either the climate or his social surroundings.

For "Laissez faire" is the easy motto of private life in Smyrna! And so, German, Spaniard, Italian, Greek and Frenchman babbled on in easy insolence, in the cool cafe of the Hotel Huck, ignoring the steady-eyed stranger who puffed his cheroot and calmly "took it all in," as the Yankees say. It was a trick of deportment which Howard Vinton had caught from the sly Russians who take the unwary at disadvantage in concealing their "gift of tongues" now and then!

The "Eros" had already dodged about the bay islands on two or three tacks. Howard Vinton's leap overboard had been duly admired by the veiled and shrouded Turkish women on a passing ferry-boat, and they had later run into a little cove near the outer fort, for luncheon, when Sergeant Foley waked Vinton out of a day dream.

The American's heart was far away at Southsea, and he was yearning for the letters which the fast Constantinople mail-boat must soon bring.

Here in the glowing Orient he longed for the cool streets of prim gray Southsea, where the umbrella of price and British cylinder hat denoted the man of rank; where the calm English girl demurely casts down her eyes as the dashing army officer or solid naval hero steals a glance under her veil. Sober old Portsmouth, favorite marine city of bluff Henry VIII., has its romance all its own!

Stout-hearted Queen Bess fortified it, Brunel's genius lingers around it. Grim Nelson's august shade lingers there on the glory-hallowed deck of the old Victory; Collingwood and Napier are even household names, and the shrieking sea mew sings the requiem of Kempenfelt and his eight hundred men, who went down in the Royal George.

Still, in drowsy High Street, the stone walls of the "Spotted Dog" Inn are standing where mad Felton struck down the great Duke of Buckingham, the handsome "Steenie with the face of an angel," the

careless courtier whose youthful smile bewitched the cold-hearted James—half pedant, half tyrant.

Rampart and battery, grim fort, proud steel clad tower, vast arsenal, the huge line of grim warships, the flitting uniforms of every branch of the service, speak of England's might, in its greatest naval stronghold, where loyalty shines in every eye, where the women are the wives, daughters, mothers, sisters, or brides-to-be, of heroes—and, where the tombstone speaks of the "bringing home of the warrior dead" from England's fields of blood, scattered around the world wherever its ensign has kissed the breeze.

Howard Vinton was dreaming, as he mused, of the unforgotten days of the past summer, and the eyes of sweet Lily Arnot were shining down upon him again in the mists of tender memory.

He started up as Foley cried, "There's a big tub of a four-master tramp coming up now from the sou'west, and here's the mail-boat away to the norrard!"

Vinton leaped to his feet. "Give me the glasses. Get all our things aboard. We must run out so we can head the four-master off. I want to get a good square look at her!"

In ten minutes the "Eros" was skimming along seaward, and an hour later the great lead-colored freighter was boring along, her red sides gleaming like blood as she rolled about like a cork.

"That's the boat," said Foley, handing back the glass. "I see the white flag with its black circle and K—those chaps' private signal." Howard Vinton's heart beat quickly as he said: "Mind your tiller! Run right across her bows, and then luff and let me have a good look at her."

In five minutes they were near enough to read the name, "Alessandro Cornaro," in great black letters, on her high bows.

Only a few lazy men dawdled on her decks, and she labored along like an overgrown sea monster in a grim silence.

"There goes up the Greek flag and her pilot signal," cried Foley.

"She's an ugly devil," muttered Vinton.

"Yes, and ugly devils, too, aboard of her!" cried Foley. "The straits of Malacca are snaky, but the Archipelago here is the last pirate nest of our times!"

There was a cluster of curious heads bobbing over the taffrail of the tramp, as Foley neatly scraped her bows, and as the "Eros" fell off, Howard Vinton saw, not a pistol shot away, Jack Masterson's grinning good-humored face. A swarthy officer, glass in hand, stood on the quarter deck and, leaning over the rail at Masterson's side was the red-faced old reprobate engineer, Sandy McGregor.

Vinton never raised a hand in recognition, and the "Eros" darted away toward the mouth of the mole, while the "Cornaro," in a great rounding sweep, stood far up Smyrna Bay to where fifty anchored barges were waiting, two leagues above the anchorage of the passenger steamers.

The "richest cargo that ever left the Levant" was already awaiting the rejuvenated old shell, which crawled along, high and empty, toward the barge anchorage.

"Put me ashore in front of the hotel as soon as you can now!" cried Vinton, for the mail steamer had swept by like a flash, and the "letters from England" were already his one object.

"I will go up to the British Consulate, Foley," earnestly said Vinton. "I won't risk Masterson coming to the hotel. I have my own reasons! You can look in three or four times in the early evening at the 'Scottish Arms.' You got a good look at Jack as he passed.

"Jack saw me very plainly—he will come to the 'Scottish Arms' the very moment he gets shore leave. Tell him to come at once to the British Consul's house, and ask for me! The servants will have word! I will wait there till midnight! Not a moment later. If he can't get off to-night, he will to-morrow! Do not be

seen outside with Masterson! Don't take him to the Hotel Huck! I will come back in the carriage!"

The "Eros" swept up to the hotel sea wall, as the obedient Foley said, "Aye-aye, sir!" But Howard Vinton did not hear him, for a six-oared barge now swept past them, at a dashing pace.

Under the sun umbrellas, Vinton saw the gray smug face of the heavy-set French ex-convict, and Dimitri Nicolo's dark scowling beauty.

"Off for the 'Cornaro'!" divined Vinton. "Ah! Your play days are now over, Capitano Dimitri Nicolo! for there is your ark awaiting you, and the spider webs of Komanos and Company are all woven! I fancy that your burning eyes will turn eagerly toward the Hotel Huck, in your exile here on the bay, while your fellow scoundrel woos the fickle Agathe!"

The barge was only a speck up the blue bay, as Vinton clambered over the side of the "Eros" and was paddled up to the steps in front of the grand Hotel Huck.

The great four-master was already at anchor amid the fleet of barges, and a dozen boats were chasing the swift cutter of Emile Bouclair. A little steam launch with the Turkish crescent flag bobbed along, its tiny cabin resplendent with crimson fez-covered heads, and the flash of golden embroidery and silver-mounted scimetars told of the swarming customs and port officers.

"Where the carcass is,—there will be the crows, also," muttered Howard Vinton as he left Sergeant Foley in the little canoe, giving his orders for the night to the boatkeepers. The young American pushed through a crowd of beggars, fruit-sellers, and lemonade peddlers, and threw up his hand to call a passing carriage.

The old rattle-trap lumbered up—one of the world's discarded equipages which in their days of ruin seem to be divided between Switzerland and the Orient. A tall, graceful woman, veiled in white and shrouded in the black Turkish gown, pushed smartly through

the beggars and held a basket of flowers before him. In her right hand was a red rose!

Vinton started as the flower seller whispered, in English, "I saw your boat coming in from sea. They are both gone out to the steamer. It was my only chance. Come to-morrow morning at ten, alone, to the tower of the old castle, on the Pagus. I must see you,—for your life. Trust to me. Remember! Come alone! Or else, I will not speak! You are in mortal danger,—now go. But, drink no wine to-night at the hotel. I will watch over you. Trust to me!"

Vinton had mechanically grasped a bunch of the flowers and laid a ten piastre piece in the slender hand, covered with the flowing silver scarf. He silently nodded, and then sprang into the carriage.

When he dared at last to turn his head, the tall, graceful figure had darted across the mole to the side street of the great hotel.

The two sorry old jades were rattling down the mole, when Foley waved his hand from afar in token of his own departure for the Scottish Arms.

"Agathe the Serpent!" murmured the astonished American. "A daylight masquerade at the risk of her life! Nicolo would surely poignard her—if he knew! And,—Bouclair! He would strangle her."

The British official's house was reached before Vinton had decided upon his course. "Is it a trap?" he mused, as he waited in the Consul's snuggery for the dispatches and letters. "I can be armed to the teeth. Shall I take Foley? Dare I tell him? Or, perhaps, Jack Masterson?"

There was a generous thrill of manhood in Howard Vinton's heart. "I will take or leave her warning! But I will not trap her! She risks as much as I do!"

A packet of letters, brought in by Fitzgerald himself, brought more than the pale radiance of South-sea's sun into the American's heart. He was wrapped in the mantle of his delicious secret, as he absently answered the jolly official's queries.

For his own liberal use of Lily Arnot's stationery

had evoked on her part a confidence which told him of all the gentle secrets of the blue-eyed English girl's heart. The tender words danced before his loving eyes and he longed for solitude to read the shy confession again and again.

But, before the Consul had thrown down the last "Times," as the mantel clock struck nine, the butler announced a visitor for the Consul's guest.

"Take him into the library," said Fitzgerald, "and tell him to come here freely, but,—for Heaven's sake, never to speak to you on the street, or even show up at the Hotel Huck. He would soon be a 'floater,' if he were found out!"

It was midnight before Jack Masterson had finished his relation of the voyage. "The strangest thing is, that this chap Bouclair has ordered every soul off the vessel, but the Italian officers and old Sandy. I've got my quarters at the Scottish Arms. The men are a desperate gang, and they're all given a shore leave, and the Italian trattoria puts them up.

"The Turkish stevedores will load the ship. They've put their own Turkish watchers aboard. It looks as if they were going to monkey with the cargo someway. I won't have no show to tell you—for old Sandy told me not to come back to the ship. 'You've got a good lay, my boy, and I'll take you to London. Your pay and grub goes on. I'll chalk up your shore bill, but be sure to keep away from the boat till we make steam.' So, I'm just a gentleman of leisure."

A sudden thought struck Vinton. "Jack!" he said, "you know the old tower of the castle on the Pagus." The sailor nodded.

"Many a jolly lark I've had there."

"Then, for my life's sake, for our secret, get up there at nine to-morrow, with both your belt pistols. Hide inside the old castle. I'm coming there, alone—at ten sharp—to meet a woman. If you hear my revolver, run in and stand by; if you don't,—wait for me in the old castle yard and I will join you there alone. You

can have your own carriage drive over the hill and wait.

"I'll send mine away. You can watch out and see me come up the hill, but don't show yourself, unless you hear my pistol, till I come. If I don't join you by half past ten, come in there!"

"All right! Master Howard," said the sturdy Briton. "But you mind your eye! There's been many a man 'donc up' there. Knives and scimetars make no noise!"

"I've got two good revolvers and my rifle cane!" smiled Vinton. "It's all right! I'll take the risk—for—I've got to! And—silence to all about this! Not a word to Foley!"

Howard Vinton held out a ten-pound note. "Bless you!" said Jack. "Dear old 'Shun Lee' just stuffed me with money. I've more than I want,—and—" he chuckled, "I get a rattling good pay from these men! Now, I'll get the whole thing, bit by bit, out of Sandy McGregor; for he'll be off to-morrow for his grog and lay off at the Scottish Arms. He must never see us speak together.

"Foley don't matter, but they would throw me to the sharks, off Lipari, after they get under way. Whatever their game is, it's the run of a life!

"This devil Bouclair set up champagne for all hands, and, Dimitri Nicolo, the Greek cutthroat, is now in charge of the 'Cornaro.'

"There are fifty Turks tumbling the cargo in now. They just ballasted her enough to ride. The ballast goes out one side, as the cargo comes in at the other. There's five hundred pipes of olive oil alongside now worth twenty pounds a pipe. That's their bottom layer.

"Now, I'll take a passing trap. Old Sandy may have come off with Bouclair. The captain's in command now. For God's sake, mind your eye! I'll be there, and ready to shoot, too!"

Vinton smiled. "Oh! It's a little matter of business!"

"Yes, I know it. A bright-eyed lass; a Smyrna devil!" mused Jack Masterson, as he rolled away.

"Young men will be young men!" And he sighed, forgetting some palpable slips of his own past life!

But, Howard Vinton carefully deposited in the Consul's steel safe, the notes which he had made of Jack Masterson's disclosures, and before he alighted from the Consul's carriage at the Grand Hotel Huck, the telegraph key was clicking off the Consul's message to Athens, bearing tidings of grave moment to the anxious Captain Enos Drage.

Love was no part of Howard Vinton's pressing business at the Tower in the old castle. His heart was firmly anchored at Southsea.

There was no sound of revelry from Bouclair's apartments as Vinton strolled along the great hall of the second floor. To his surprise, the door of his apartment was ajar. He entered. The room was dark.

The quick spurt of a fusee showed him Foley lying outstretched on a Japanese lounge, motionless. Revolver in hand, the American then sprang to the dressing table and lit the tall candles.

The windows were closed. The room was in disorder. A claret bottle stood partly emptied on the table. A single glass was beside it. He leaned over the prostrate man and smelled his breath.

"Drunk! A soldier's failing!" With a hand on the man's heart, he found it beating faintly "Fever! Heat fatigue!" he mused. And, then, Agathe's warning flashed over him!

"Drugged!" he softly said. "I'll make no outcry!" And he locked his door, and tearing off the man's upper raiment, sponged his breast and neck, liberally dosing him with sniffs of ammonia. The stout Foley was all right in an hour.

He feebly protested at the fumes of the life-giving hartshorn, and Mr. Howard Vinton, amateur nurse, listened in vain for any sounds from his romantic neighbors.

"This little job was probably meant for me! They didn't count on poor Foley's 'voyage of discovery,'" growled the American, as he watched the man at last

coming slowly out of his dazed condition. "I think that Madame Agathe can give me the secret!" Vinton laughed as he noted the disordered room.

"They have surely rummaged it over, and—in vain!" It came over him then that Foley by chance had tested the wine, and so had been an unwilling victim. "I'll just have Fitzgerald give me a good valet, also, one of his own retinue, and he can take another room. This time the trick has failed. They intended to search my effects or go further, if we both should be dosed. And, the poor fellow must have left the door unlocked. Some straggler may have done this. They counted on entering our room at night,—but, how?"

Howard Vinton drew a heavy lounge against the one door. He laid down upon it, revolver at hand, and awoke to find the greatly downcast Foley humbly regarding him in the early dawn.

"Not a word now!" whispered Vinton. "Dress as usual, get down to your breakfast, and order mine. Go out and signal for the boat. We'll take a freshener, and then you can tell me all. Are you all right now?"

"Just a bit stupid, sir!" the abashed sergeant said. "They loaded up the wine on me. I'll be soon all right, with the salt breeze. It was a shabby trick!" he growled.

Mr. Howard Vinton watched with a peculiar smile the departure of Emile Bouclair's cutter at eight o'clock for the "Alessandro Cornaro."

"I've changed my mind, Sergeant," he shortly said. "You can go and take a race around the bay. I'll be back here at noon,—and,—remember, do not mention your adventure. But, be sure to touch nothing in our rooms. Not even the hotel water!

"I'll meet you here,—at noon. If I'm not here, then you must take a trap and come to the Consulate."

When the boat was well off shore, Howard Vinton took a carriage and drove slowly up the road to the old castle, armed and watchful.

BOOK II.—In the Toils.

CHAPTER VI.

AT GIBRALTAR—THE MAN WHO WAS LEFT AT MALTA.

The alert young American had taken the precaution to run into the English Club and get a reliable driver and an excellent team selected by the chief steward.

"This man is steady, well armed and experienced! Consul Fitzgerald uses him to transport the official mail bags. You can rely on him, my Lord," the honest steward said. "It's a spookish place up there!" Howard Vinton smiled faintly and tossed the Club steward a Turkish guinea.

"It costs a little to be a lord, but—it pays!" mused Vinton as the team briskly trotted along out past the alabaster mosque, on skirting the great cypress cemetery clasped in the bosom of the great growing city.

His yachting glasses were at hand, and as he halted half way up the two-thousand-foot hill of Mons Pagus he saw a trap driving briskly away from the great oblong castle above him and disappear over the hill to the south. "There's Jack Masterson already. I hope he is not tipsy like the genial Foley. He might spoil all. I suppose Foley celebrated his meeting with Jack." He had sternly forbidden the repentant sergeant from all unwary experimenting upon the wines in the apartment in future.

In an hour, the carriage reached the western spur of the hill, on which the battlemented watch tower of the old castle stood. Quickly leveling his glasses, Vinton saw a common droschky of the street crawling up the road after him, and the black shrouded form of a

Turkish woman, her silver veil shining out, was the only occupant.

"Ah! There comes the Lady of the Red Rose!" he cried, with a strangely beating heart. And then, he suddenly became aware of the splendid facilities for hide and seek provided by the customs of Mohammedan female disguise.

"It's a sword that cuts both ways," he laughed. "See here, Abdallah," he said to the driver. "Drive your horses over into the shade, behind the tower. Tie them. If you hear any outcry or firing in the tower you can come in to my aid; otherwise wait there till I join you."

Abdallah grinned. He was the factotum of all the gay young English and American officers, and he had often seen many a veiled Fatima keep her willing tryst at the old Genoese castle whence the crusaders once eagerly descended to skillfully transfix the Paynim on their lances.

But Howard Vinton was now sweeping the blue bay with his signal glasses. There was a cloud of busy barges hovering around the giant tramp, and no smoke poured from the funnels of the "Alessandro Cornaro."

Scattered over the tranquil bay were several puffing tugs with long linked lines of barges dragging inertly along, in the direction of the tramp steamer. "They are chucking in the cargo at a lively rate!" he mused, for the huge booms were swinging out from the three forward masts, and the deck was clustered with turbaned stevedores.

A single moment he enjoyed the superb panorama of Smyrna Bay,—the vast city dreaming below him on the south shore,—the railway skirting the blue waters to the east,—far out to the west the enchanted islands of the Greek sea lay. Across the bay to the north the beautiful summer villages were spread out.

The huge fort on its island rocky mole lay far away to the west, its six great Krupps gleaming black and ugly. The blood-red flag waved there, the sentinels' bayonets flashed in the sun, and the singing

bugle rang out in defiance from the great English war ships, swimming between blue sea and pale apple green sky, almost at his feet. Glancing to the south and east the fruitful plains of the rich pachalik of Smyrna swept away into the picturesque mountain valleys of the province of Anatolia, the richest jewel of the Turkish crown.

But, a moment he dreamed, as the rattle of wheels awakened him. He strode on to the door of the old square keep. Forty feet square and a hundred and fifty high, its gaping windows were grinning like sightless eyes. A high double curtain wall led along to the main rectangle of the old castle, whose deserted battlements and crenelated towers were silently crumbling to ruin. A vast walled enclosure to the east had sheltered the charges of the garrison in the olden days.

There was a half light in the interior, and with his cocked revolver in hand, Vinton explored every corner. Bending down at the door leading out to the covered way joining the western tower and the old castle, built along the spinal ridge, Vinton recognized Jack Masterson, standing ready under the old grand entrance. He was now ashamed of his fears, as the doorway was darkened but for a moment.

Throwing off her veil, Agathe Mitis stood there revealed in all her glowing beauty!

"You have done well, my Lord," she gasped, as blushes deepened the crimson on her cheeks. "You may yet be saved! Now, listen to me, and,—leave Smyrna at once. The captain of the 'Apollo' has told all of your rank and your enormous wealth! There is a plot to capture you while in your boat out on the bay, and then to run you over to the keeping of the Greek bandits behind Athens. There you will be held for an enormous ransom, and be tortured,—perhaps, killed!

"The town is now filled with dangerous men. Do not go out of the reach of the war ships and the English Consul. You are watched every single moment.

The hotel rooms you use have been entered and searched!

"They wished to get at your private papers and find out about your letter of credit. The wine was drugged for you both last night. Ask me not how I know. I do know! And the poor secretary left the key in the door. Impressions of it have been taken. Duplicates will be made. They are enraged now, for they found nothing. You staid out very late last night. If you had both drank of the wine, then, lowered insensible out of a side window, you would have been carried down to the mole. If your valuables were on your person, you would perhaps have been cast into the sea out beyond the fort, like poor Robinson.

"Ah! It was awful! The tide swept him back—a dead witness, after many days. If you could be ensnared, on the outskirts, you might perhaps be hidden in the interior, and then tortured till you drew your letter of credit funds,—then, after being dosed with some memory-killing poison, you might be held for a great reward or a humbug rescue effected. Linger not in Smyrna!"

The poor woman glanced in terror at the doors and windows, as she shuddered. "I must go! I would be strangled if they knew!"

Vinton spoke kindly to the frightened dancer. "Why do they seek my life?" he said, his anger rising at the cowardly plot.

"Because you are an English Lord, and,—vastly rich. Be warned! You should go over to Athens, or else take the Russian steamer to Alexandria!" And she wept, trembling as she plead with the secret agent of Lloyds.

"Who are they, these men?" he cautiously asked.

"Alas! I dare not tell you. There is a desperate gang here,—merchants,—officials,—Greek bandits,—gamblers,—European women,—all are secretly united, and one devil is at the head, who never spared either man nor woman! Now, remember! If you heed not my warning, I shall still watch over you, but, go—go at once, I beg!"

And she grasped his arms in all the energy of a woman's despair.

"I dare not tell you more. They are going to have secret meetings every night now. I will be watched, and I may not have the chance to see you soon again. Never notice me! I will find the way. You are an Englishman. I was so happy once in England. I have lived under your flag. It was the fatal cholera that carried off the man whom I once loved, and that misfortune left me stranded here among these villains. He was an Englishman; a noble heart, and I would save you now for his sake."

As she spoke a shrill whistle was heard, and then, swiftly as the antelope leaps away from the cheetah, the dark-eyed Agathe fled, her face covered in the silvery Moslem veil.

Howard Vinton sprang out of the nearest window, alighting on the grassy turf. He saw the driver lashing his horses down the road and Agathe was soon hidden by the crest of a little valley sweeping to the south. Springing along the old covered way he joined the anxious Jack Masterson, and the two, without a word, concealed themselves in the dark corner of an old groined arch.

"All right now, Jack!" cheerily cried Vinton. "There are a lot of sight-seers nearing the place. Slip out and send your own carriage home down the road. The driver must not see me. Then join me here. My carriage is over there behind yonder wall.

"I wish you to drive me down to the Consul's house, by the east end of the town, and you must get there as soon as you can," the young man ordered.

In ten minutes, the American and the sturdy engineer were far away over the eastern crest of Pagus, trotting along, out of sight of all prying eyes. "What's my lay now?" demanded Jack, as they rode along, their heavy revolvers ready for instant use.

"I wish you to be just as agreeable a host as possible to old McGregor, the chief. Come up to the consulate every day and ask for letters. The secretary will tell

you when I need to see you in the evening. Find out all you can, in every way. It will take a month to load this boat. I want to be cautious with Mc, the engineer. Let him tell you, bit by bit, his story. Never recognize me. You might as well find out how long before the 'Cornaro' will sail. You can run over to Athens and spend a week with Captain Drage, and get all his secret instructions. Then come back here for the London run.

"Now, when we strike the east end of the city, you can jump out and take your way back to the Scottish Arms, by the first trap." It was an hour after Howard Vinton had safely reached the consulate before he had resolved upon his future course. "It is clear that they do not suspect my real character. And the danger,—such as it is,—is one that I can both face and avoid."

Vinton could not bring himself to expose the brave Agathe to the danger of any future reprisals. "I'll not tell Fitzgerald,—nor even Van Lennep, but I will hang on and hold the fort. If I make any sudden departure, or change my habits, this poor woman may perhaps suffer for her strange generosity of conduct. There is always safety in numbers! I will get an extra man from Fitzgerald and, so, either Foley or him can be every moment in the room. The suburbs I will avoid save under escort, and I can either vary my habits and sleep aboard the corvette, on the pretext of the coolness, or fall gradually into the habit of using a room at Fitzgerald's. At the table d'hote I am safe! The English Club is near, and with this roving plan I can be in and out of my rooms at all hours. Perhaps the little feud between Bouclair and Nicolo may come to a head when the 'Alessandro Cornaro' sails. It is clear that Captain Dimitri Nicolo may not care to leave this pretty woman to the tender mercies of that brute Bouclair."

And the young secret agent decided to confine his future excursions on the "Eros" to box-hauling about

the bay, well out of range of the "Cornaro" and to keep always in sight of the vessels of the English fleet.

"I must stay here at the Grand Hotel Huck until the vessel sails," he decided, at last. "By that time Van Lennep will have all these financial operations pretty well plotted out, and they must at once insure, either here, or in Constantinople—or London. There are a thousand agents available to watch them. Consul Fitzgerald has a key to the proposed swindle, in all the consular invoices. If there is a tragedy of the sea to come, it will be located probably between Malta and Gibraltar. Old 'Shun Lee' will be off on the chase, the very moment the boat sails. If Van Lennep covers up his own tracks, I am about the only one of the party left in any danger. When we have led them into the trap, I will quietly establish myself at the Consulate. Then, on the first war vessel, I can be off for Malta, or Constantinople, and I can go home and transact 'that little bit of business' at Southsea." And so Howard Vinton determined to stick to his guns!

When a few days later, Fitzgerald, Van Lennep and Howard Vinton held a council of war, there was a vast change in the appearance of the great steamer "Alessandro Cornaro."

Her red sheathing was no longer visible, she was deep in the water, and the unexampled activity of the swarming stevedores convulsed the sleepy town of Smyrna. There was still the same great swarm of barges around her, with a dozen small anchored craft waiting to aid her in loading her down to the Plimsoll line.

Feluccas, scows, an old brig or two, and Greek boats had been gathered in from the Dardanelles and Salonique. Vinton's face grew grave as Van Lennep frankly explained that he was baffled.

"Beyond knowing that a half dozen secret meetings of the old 'Komanos and Company' gang have taken place, and that Bouclair has held a couple of big jollifications in the Hotel Huck, there is not a sign of the real intentions of these fellows. They have not ap-

plied here as yet for a single dollar of insurance, and the whole town agrees that the cargo is the richest—by far the richest,—which ever left the Levant. But they must give a sign soon. They won't sail without covering all with insurance. She will be loaded in ten days, unless they mean to break her in two right here at the anchorage."

The sad-eyed German was depressed. "I have hardly anything to report to Captain Drage at Athens." Both the older men were now surprised at Howard Vinton's calmness.

He had not chosen to speak to them of the sudden disappearance of Jack Masterson who had carried a budget of secret details stored up in his mind, when he slipped away to the Piraeus on an available Italian boat.

"You have not been able to gain any news, Vinton?" demanded the Consul. Howard shook his head.

"My room has not been left alone for a moment since Foley was overcome by temptation," he smiled.

"I have listened to the chatter of the three dozen who ornament the table d'hote of the Hotel Huck. Though they rattle away in German, French and Italian, there has never been one suspicious word. But five or six of these fellows vary the monotony by dining in Bouclair's rooms, and there's a stream of messengers,—zaptiehs,—soldiers,—officers,—dervishes and high-grade Turks always running in and out of his rooms. Their private business is probably transacted there.

"Captain Nicolo has never left his ship since the hatches were opened. I have seen the handsome woman of the conspiracy frequently going off to the ship in company with Bouclair. As for my own boat trips on the bay, I have only learned by ocular proof that the crew are all back on board, and they are getting all 'in ship shape' for sailing."

"Yes!" said Van Lennep, "and the coaling has been going on simultaneously. I expect to awake some morning and find that the 'Cornaro' has slipped out of the harbor and vanished in the night!"

Consul Fitzgerald mused over a paper in his hand. 'It is incomprehensible that we cannot pierce their lines. Here is the cargo on board, roughly jotted up from the Consular invoices as now certified. It is a floating fortune." He read off the items:

"Five hundred cases opium, three hundred tons of olive oil (five hundred pipes), three hundred tons of valonia, five thousand sacks dried figs, three thousand boxes seedless raisins, forty thousand half-boxes Sultana raisins, thirty-five hundred packages 'sultanines,' and some smaller items.

"It is a tremendous mass of property!" he mused, "to be entrusted to these scoundrels. And what in God's name will 'Komanos and Company' do with it?" the sad-eyed Van Lennep gruffly answered:

"Run away with it! Steal it by fraudulent bankruptcy! Burn it,—sink it,—anything but pay for it!"

"But who gives these fellows such a cargo?" persisted the bluff English official.

"Well! They have scraped the whole coast from Salonique to the Dardanelles. From Chios,—Aleppos —and Smyrna, over to Candia. It is beyond my ken," the local agent of Lloyds answered.

"I have swarms of insurance brokers who have been watching my office to see the first applications for insurance, and not one has appeared. Either they are delaying, or else there is some new plan which is to me a mystery."

"It may be they will try the foreign companies," gravely suggested the Consul. "Not a policy has been applied for, my colleagues tell me," said Van Lennep. "And the ship,—her ownership,—her destination,—and the whole affair, is a daily growing mystery. This gigantic consignment is sufficient to break the London market down to a starvation point!" the watchful German said. "I have tried to do my duty. but here I am powerless—there seems to be left no duty to do!"

"Some giant speculation with its headquarters in London. Some desire to slyly corner the market," suggested Fitzgerald. "Hardly possible! The sailing will

be duly telegraphed, and it will take three weeks for this vessel to reach the Thames, unless she founders in the Bay of Biscay."

"Well! my friends! Old Captain Drage is ready to follow her with the swift 'Conqueror.' A stern chase is a long one, but the only thing to do here is to run her down, from port to port, on her voyage, and then secretly dog her from her anchorage to the London Docks."

There was little to reward the men who watched the lynx-eyed scoundrels operating behind the masterly intelligence of Emile Bouclair. Howard Vinton was nonplussed and only awaited the return of Jack Masterson to receive the opinion of "Shun Lee Drage," who was panting to chase the mysterious vessel to her final destination.

As Vinton rode back to the hotel he wondered at the singular silence of Agathe the Serpent. Several times he had met Bouclair face to face in the hall. The astute Frenchman's calm face never gave a sign of the existence of the haughty stranger "Milord," who was now well known to be a man of peculiarly eccentric habits of retirement. Once only Vinton caught a flash from Agathe Mitis' eyes as she went down the broad stair with the watchful Bouclair.

It was easy to verify that the dancer only went abroad now under Bouclair's escort. There had been no more suspicious meddling with "Milord" Vinton's apartments.

On this particular night it flashed over the American's mind that Agathe, herself, was under suspicion. "Does he suspect her from jealousy, or wish to prevent some private arrangement between Nicolo and the Greek beauty? I'll set Jack Masterson on to watch!"

There was a growing evidence of the haste to dispatch the now deeply loaded "Alessandro Cornaro" when all the barges disappeared from her sides. Dozens of little provision boats hovered around her, and

Van Lennep was hawk-eyed in his daily watch of the Turkish Customs offices.

"Her papers are all 'en regle' now, clearance,—manifest, and all are ready," whispered Van Lennep as he met Vinton, by chance, in a lonely place. "Waiting only for orders from London. I have already telegraphed it to Captain Drage."

Vinton hastened on to a meeting with honest Jack Masterson, who had hidden himself in an humble restaurant, and sent a messenger for his fellow agent.

"Here you are!" cried Masterson. "I'm off to the boat. They are going to turn the engines over. I've got all my own orders from Captain Enos. I'm to get left at Malta, as if by accident, and then to telegraph fully to him, and also post the agent of Lloyds' there; then I can easily get on to Gibraltar ahead of the 'Cornaro' and join her again there. She'll be watched every mile as far as Gibraltar by the 'Conqueror.' My! what a beauty! That yacht can run three miles to the 'Cornaro's' one."

Howard Vinton then eagerly unfolded to Jack Masterson the past quarrel of the two scoundrels over Agathe the Serpent. "I have an idea that the beautiful young woman wants to give Mr. Emile Bouclair the slip, and then run off with her lover Nicolo, on the boat. Watch both her and the captain and post me," said the anxious American who unfolded all his orders.

"Just as I thought!" he growled. "I am to remain quietly here—after the boat sails, and not to leave till I get a positive order from London or from Drage himself. He fears that Van Lennep might be sacrificed if I betrayed the secret watch, by following the departing boat."

"See here!" said Masterson. "Old McPherson of the Scottish Arms is to send a boat off to McGregor, and I, with our mess goods. I'll send back a letter to you by the man, to be left on your boat here,—the 'Eros.' The Scottish Arms host is all right,—we are doing a bit of smuggling for him. But never dare to

mention my name. I'll post you about the pretty woman and the two rivals."

"You must not fail me, Jack!" gravely said the American. "You know how much Captain Drage depends on you and I. There's a fortune for him, depending on the use of our wits and,—more than a fortune,—to me!"

"Bless your stars! How easy!" said the engineer. "It's true we are almost ready to sail. But I have to have a day's notice to get my stoker's gang together and charge the fires. There's nothing here that can tow us out of the harbor. You can keep Sergeant Foley on watch, to see the first smoke from our stacks. Your consul friend and Van Lennep can have their spies all out. Now, post your two boatkeepers on the 'Eros' to watch every movement of the 'Cornaro' night and day, and give them a good night glass. We will be all lit up, even if we run out at night. One of the men can then paddle off in the skiff and rouse you, and so you can be on the 'Eros' when my messenger comes.

"I know that I will not be allowed to leave the 'Cornaro' after we get our orders to sail, and the Turkish officials seal up the hatches. But, you must post Captain Drage at Piraeus at once, by cipher telegram. He will stand up and down across the channel between Andra and Nicaria. I've drawn the rig and given him all the boat's signals, her number and her colors. I quietly stole the whole information. Once sighting her, he will run on ahead to Cerigo and stand across by Cerigotto to Candia,—then he will bear away, on a rambling yacht course, and keep her always in sight to Malta. He'll hear from me there. There's a dozen steamers a week to Marseilles, and he can strike London a week before we get there.

"The 'Conqueror' will follow the 'Alessandro Cornaro' to Gibraltar, and Hozier has already sent his dispatches to every Spanish and Portuguese port! But I'll get you the last news, and you be out in your boat on the watch. It's my last chance to help you, for,

by God, Nicolo would have me knifed and thrown overboard if he suspected! He is a desperate scoundrel, and he, too, has had it hot and heavy with old Bouclair. I see now that they are quarreling about the woman! And she isn't worth it! Keep your eyes on her. She may give the trick away!"

"All right, Jack," heartily said Howard Vinton; "but, you must keep your own weather eye open! For God's sake don't drink while you are aboard!"

"I know what I'm risking," said the bluff old engineer, as he significantly drew his hand across his throat.

"How far are you coaled?" Vinton demanded.

"Only to Gibraltar," the sailor answered. "They've stuffed her so full of cargo, we have to lay two or three days at Gibraltar for coal.

"Now, it's a shake and break away," said Jack. "I feel it in my bones that they won't let me off the ship after this—and I've got the excuse to have old Sandy send my kit aboard. I'll do my best for you and 'Shun Lee,' as well as 'Mary Horton.'"

"No use to hope for a pointer from old McGregor! He told me that this was his last run, and he is in to make a snug berth for himself, and while he will protect me, he will not give up the swindle! They 'wouldn't let him know till the last minute, anyway.' There's been a couple of dozen of these beach combers counseling on board in the big cabin, by the hour, with Nicolo and Bouclair. They are Greeks, low Italians, Armenians, Turkish merchants, and a lot of them gold-laced fellows! Lord! They're a nasty lot! Now, I'm off. Look out for your own life! It's a regular devil's den here!"

Howard Vinton wandered about the bazaars for a couple of hours and cautiously regained his hotel. There was no sign of hope in the sad-eyed Van Lennep's face as the three friends met around Fitzgerald's table.

"If we can only find out their game, it will be only after the 'Cornaro' sails," declared the mystified Ger-

man. "There's not a dollar of insurance placed here upon her, and the foreign brokers are watching my every movement. I find that heavy drafts have been drawn against Sassoon & Company of London against the bulk of the opium, and some very considerable advances have been made through 'Schnorr & Co.' of Cadogan Buildings, London. What they are waiting for here, I don't know! Time alone will tell. I have my own spies watching night and day! I will call our little circle together the very moment she moves, and then we can beat the 'tramp' as far as Athens and Malta with our telegraphed messages! We have done our whole duty! And now let us all be quiescent till she sails! We must not alarm them!"

And then, Howard Vinton found life at Smyrna a wearisome drag. His watch in the "Eros," with the eager Sergeant Foley, were on duty day and night. The American systematically plotted out the city and explored all its quaint attractions day by day as the heavy hours crawled away. He marveled at the silence of Agathe, his self-constituted guardian, until his watchers reported that she went off daily to the "Cornaro" in Bouclair's cutter; but now she was always under the escort of a forbidding-looking Turkish woman.

"So, he suspects the bird of passage!" mused Vinton. "Is he afraid that she will run away, or is there some secret that she might divulge?" For, the stolid Frenchman himself carefully received her every evening at the boat steps. "She never will be able to give this watchful brute the slip," decided the American, who had at last realized that Bouclair probably held Agathe the Serpent as a hostage for Dimitri Nicolo's "faithful performance of his duties!"

In the consular carriage, rolling along the mole, Howard Vinton had anxiously noted the smoke from the "Cornaro's" stacks, indicating the machinery trials. And the jolly face of Jack Masterson beamed out no more at the "Scottish Arms."

"It is strange," said Van Lennep, after a long week's

delay had elapsed, "none of the crew are allowed to quit the ship even for a moment! And still she does not go! I have one fellow who is getting rich on my bribes, and he tells me the 'order to pass the forts' is all signed and ready, waiting only for Bouclair's demand.

"And there's not a single pound of insurance taken out on her here! The drafts and bills of lading are all in London now." "Then, they have effected heavy insurances outside of our local lines!" gravely said the Consul. "I have given Captain Drage a daily report 'Still here.' The moment she sails you must come here, Vinton, and then notify him through me, so that the 'Conqueror' can dog the voyage. There is mischief lurking in their every movement!"

Mr. Howard Vinton had recurred to his journalistic duties sufficiently to keep up an active report to Walton at Paris as to all the shifting problems of Armenia, and the American Consul often chuckled as he sent off lengthy telegrams in Bennett's handy cipher.

"There's something strange about the wires, my boy," he said to the pseudo lord. "This fellow Bouclair here has been piling up the telegrams in the last week, and he has even used all 'Reuter's' facilities, and the 'Agence Havas,' here! He has been going it blind, too, on Trieste, Paris and London! I'll tell you—there's something very snaky up! I've been watching this 'Alessandro Cornaro,' and somebody is either going to be a money king or else go to the wall! They are cornering the London market in some vast speculation! Nobody knows who is at the end of anything here; but I can get all your press dispatches through finally."

Vinton relieved his mind by telegraphing this news to the anxious old captain, chafing on the yacht "Conqueror," and now lying with banked fires in the snug harbor of the Porto Drakoni.

He had "used up" all the stationery which Miss Lily Arnot kindly provided, and he poured out his loneliness on this particular evening in fervent dispatches.

Long he sat on the cool balcony, watching the yellow masthead lights of the "Cornaro" shimmering out over the silent waters of Smyrna Bay. He was worn and wearied with the bootless quest.

"If they don't go soon, then I will," he swore in a sudden disgust. "For some fellow of H. B. M. service will be artfully moving on to the storm of 'The Child's' heart, under the mighty shield of Miss Lavinia." He was about to enter his rooms when the sound of a bitter altercation reached him.

There was no mistaking a woman's passionate reproaches and a man's cold brutality.

"People who wrangle should shut their windows," he mused, and then, with a start, he realized that the quarrel was in Bouclair's splendid corner rooms. He rose, and entering his own bed-room, leaned out and closed his own windows.

The sound of oaths and sobbing was his last observation. "Foolish that I never noticed that!" he said, as he now noted a broad ledge of masonry nearly a foot wide connecting the two galleries. "Anyone could easily slip around there, and so come in and cut my throat! I think that I will carefully look to my hooks and bars!" And long after he lay down to rest the bitter struggle of woman's desperation and man's inhumanity went on!

"It's about the handsome Greek captain," he murmured, as he fell into a confused medley of vain dreams. But no shadows of the night clung to him when he was softly roused by Sergeant Foley.

"Dress yourself, sir!" the soldier whispered. "There's great clouds of smoke now pouring out of the funnels of the tramp. I'll be bail that they are off this morning!" Howard Vinton was soon on his feet and ready in a moment.

"Slip out quietly and have my boat made ready," he said. "Then get away and warn Mr. Van Lennep. Come back to me here—I will wait here—and we will take our coffee as usual. I'll have the valet strictly watch the rooms! I'll keep an eye, too, on Bouclair,

and you must watch over this woman! I fancy there may be some trouble here! They quarreled all the night. Tell Van Lennep to put his own man on watch, and follow Bouclair to the Customs House!"

Throwing open his windows, to his inexpressible delight the American saw the great black clouds rising over the "Cornaro" and drifting away eastward, leaving long opaque shades on the dancing blue waters! Seated there alone, his eyes strained upon the ship, his glasses told him of the bustle of departure. And then the sounds of hurry and loud voices in the next rooms were audible, as it was evident that Monsieur Emile Bouclair was energetically preparing for a very busy day. When Howard Vinton descended to the coffee room he saw Emile Bouclair at the front door, and in an earnest converse with the Turkish woman who had been for two weeks Agathe Mitis' jailer.

"Ah! Final orders, I suppose!" he mused, as the old woman nodded and mounted the stair.

Bouclair sprang into a waiting carriage, and as Vinton strolled along to the front door he saw a triangular fleet of little boats speeding off to the huge "Alessandro Cornaro."

"It's a go, sure enough!" said the gleeful Yankee, as he exchanged a word with Foley. "All right," the Sergeant whispered. "Van Lennep is on Bouclair's track! The boat is ready!"

"Then, watch the room above," said Vinton; "I'll keep my own eye on the 'Cornaro' here from the breakfast room! If she moves out, then you get to the Consul with my dispatch, and join me later in the boat. We will watch for you here at the steps!" He slipped the paper in the Sergeant's hand.

The American had hardly broken his roll and swallowed a hasty cup of coffee when he saw the huge "Cornaro" swinging slowly around and beginning a great circle to place her long keel in the central line of the deepest channel. A smart steam launch flying the port officer's flag dashed out along the mole, and Monsieur Emile Bouclair's pith helmet and green-

lined sun umbrella shone out gaily there above the red fezzes of the lolling Turkish officers.

The launch sped away up to the east to cut off the great steamship on her outward way. "Last orders!" laughed Vinton, as the launch sped on. The little boats were already pulling homeward.

But the American's laugh ceased as through the open door of the cafe he saw Agathe the Serpent, muffled in her Turkish disguise, glide swiftly out of the great hall of the Hotel Huck!

In a moment, the alert Yankee was on her trail! He sauntered easily out of the house and then rapidly followed the swiftly gliding form of Agathe to the boat landing, hidden from view of the Hotel Huck by the tall Custom House, reaching out on the long mole. When Vinton reached the western side of the mole the lithe Greek girl had leaped into a little cutter, and already the leg of mutton sail was loosened.

Two athletic Greeks in long red bonnets were sweeping the boat around the end of the mole.

In a moment the light bark was skimming down the bay like a sea hawk! "Stole away, by heavens!" cried Vinton. "There'll be the devil to pay now!" With a swift premonition of coming trouble Howard Vinton hastened back to the hotel.

"I can see the 'Cornaro' till she is out at sea, past the fort, from my own balcony!" With a beating heart he watched the deeply-laden leviathan crawl slowly along past the city front, and then he nervously turned the glasses toward the Greek fisher boat, now a league down the bay, far out in the center of the gulf.

"I wonder if Agathe has made a daring escape, or—did her jealous lover plan this joke on Monsieur Emile Bouclair? It's a bit of woman wit!"

And then, as the great steamer forged along, the customs launch with Bouclair dropped its towline and leisurely proceeded toward the customs mole.

"Ah! The pretty jade!" laughed Vinton, as the Greek fisher boat ran directly out into the channel,

laying drifting in the onward path of the tramp steamer.

"They will pick her up, hoist the companion way, and Bouclair is left in the lurch!" But his face grew white as the launch with the bloody crescent now shot along directly toward the mole, ploughing up the foam, and was racing along at a terrific rate of speed.

"God of heavens! He sees through the trick! They will pursue the freighter!" Howard Vinton hastened to leave his exposed position, for Sergeant Foley was hastily signaling from the "Eros."

The young American quickly ran to his room and bade the valet lock all the doors and wait inside on guard until his return.

"There's a devil of a racket next door, sir," he reported. "They have carried some one down stairs almost dead." "Hasten, and find out from the maitre d'hotel!" cried Vinton. "Be prudent! Quick, now!" and he sat, with his revolver ready at hand, when the valet ran back up stairs.

"It's the old Turkish woman—bound and gagged, and almost choked to death! The pretty Greek has cleared out!" "Here! I must get out! Remember, open these doors to no one! Watch me in the boat from the windows!"

A glance showed Vinton the Turkish launch sweeping up to the mole, and a league below the town the lateen sail of the fisher boat was shining alongside the "Alessandro Cornaro."

"Safe, by God!" cried Vinton, as the fisher boat fell off and the huge four-master swung along on her way, the white churned foam glittering behind her.

"Nothing can catch her now," he gayly said, as the black clouds rose denser from her funnels. "Hurrah for Nicolo!" and with a composed face he sauntered down to the boat landing.

There was a row-boat nearing the "Eros," and Sergeant Foley was ready at the slips in the skiff. "Hasten! Put me on board at once! I want to run down the channel!" Vinton sharply ordered, but as he

sank back in the skiff the boom of a heavy gun at the outer fort drew excited crowds to the windows of the houses and the end of wharf and quay!

"The devil!" gasped Vinton. "They have telegraphed down to the fort and stopped the 'Cornaro' with a gun!" He was on the deck of the "Eros" as the row-boat glided past, and a man handed him a newspaper rolled up, without a word.

"Cast off and stand up the bay easily, where we can see the channel, Foley!" cried Vinton. "We may be watched. Just knock around the city front, and don't pass the line of the mole! Bouclair will be after that boat in a few minutes!" And then Howard Vinton unrolled the bundle. In Jack Masterson's scrawling hand he read:

"Off for Malta—for orders. We are to pick up the woman beyond the fort! A neat trick! I overheard Bouclair's last directions. Cargo is insured for sixty-five thousand pounds in London; boat for thirty-five. Twenty consignees of cargo, mostly 'Schnorr and Co.,' and nearly all the opium goes to 'Sassoon and Co.' They've drawn already enormous advances and have insured up to the limit through their London agents. We get our orders at Malta. Look out for the trick between there and 'Gib.' Burn this and cable to Captain Drage, so he can warn all the London people. *It's to be either by fire or water.* I don't know which!"

In ten minutes, the "Eros" lay at the mole near the English Consulate. Howard Vinton jumped ashore and his fingers flew over the lines as he penned the warning telegram to "Shun Lee" Drage.

"For God's sake, put that through at once, Fitzgerald!" he cried. "Send it to the British Consul and to Drage at Piraeus, and wait at the office for the Consul's answer that Drage has received it. I will knock around on the bay and see this boat go off!"

"Depend on me," said the official. "Van Lennep is following down the shore line in his own launch, and he will send his own dispatches to Drage and to London. Just you keep cool and keep away from here

to-day. We have them trapped now, for at the first sign of any crookedness we will cable and have all the policies canceled; but that must be done by old Enos! It would be the death sentence of any one here! It's Enos Drage and Lloyds now against Dimitri Nicolo and old Sandy McGregor! For Bouclair's work is all done, and 'Komanos and Company' have a book which stands to win or lose over a hundred thousand pounds! For God's sake, be cool and careful to-day!"

Howard Vinton nodded grimly, and hastening to his boat ran out and around the British fleet. Curious Jack tars were watching a heavy tug sweeping down the bay, whereon the muskets of a platoon of zaptiehs glittered.

"Ah!" said Howard, "Bouclair thinks that his friend Nicolo might fight for the woman! I suppose he will have to use force! Poor devil! Trapped at the very gate of freedom!"

With a sudden spasm of prudence Howard Vinton leisurely ran the "Eros" back to her landing place, and ostentatiously ornamented the cafe and reading room all the afternoon!

He allowed Sergeant Foley to take a run on his own account. "Lay off and on; watch the movements of the 'Cornaro.' You can follow the police tug back into her landing, and by jumping off at the mole look in at the 'Scottish Arms,' and bring back to me any news you can pick up!"

Vinton sat enjoying his Bass' ale and poring over the illustrated journals a month old, while the hastily gathered gossips of Smyrna discussed in his presence the stopping of the "Cornaro."

"Smuggling!" said one. "Backsheesh not up to the mark!" cried another, and Howard Vinton bided his silence. But his eyes gleamed when a carriage stopped at the side door of the hotel in the dingy alley, and Emile Bouclair roughly aided a half-fainting woman to climb the stairs.

A messenger from the Consulate bade him attend the distribution of a mail, and at the door of the official

residence he met Foley. "The steamer is twenty miles out at sea now, sir," he reported, "and a Turkish officer I know tells me Bouclair beat and cruelly abused this poor woman on the tug! There was no violence on the steamer.

"This Turk tells me that Agathe swore an open vengeance and she kissed the cross on her oath! It rather amused these Turkish fellows." "I think that I will watch to-night," mused Vinton, when the Consul reported the delivery of the warning message to Captain Drage at Athens.

"I've seen Van Lennep," he said. "The 'Conqueror' has left the Piraeus on the chase by this time, and we must be simply cool and watchful, for Bouclair may think she was aided by us in her flight!"

And so, "Lord Vinton," driving leisurely to the Grand Hotel Huck, dined in solitary state at the end of the table d'hote reserved for him. There was a chattering chorus from the circle of Smyrnites at the long table, and many an eye was slyly turned with a wink toward Bouclair's magnificent rooms. For the escapade was now public property!

All unconscious of the scandal, Howard Vinton sought his own rooms. Sergeant Foley's face looked very grave as he entered. "They've had an awful quarrel," he said, "and Bouclair has now locked the doors and put a black man on duty outside, cross-legged upon his mat. The bird is caged at last, safe enough!

"He went away with the Captain of the Port in a carriage. I suppose they are off for a jollification!" "Then we'll quietly guard the public peace and sport the oak!" rejoined the American. "For the game is now made, and it will play itself out now."

There was no sound from the corner where Agathe Mitis hid her sorrows in the gloom of defeat, and Howard Vinton watched from his balcony till the last revelers deserted the broad quay. The night was dark, and only the lights on the British war vessels gleamed on the bay when Vinton lay down to rest.

The two attendants had long since sought their beds. A strange restlessness disturbed the excited American. The strange vessel, with its mysterious cargo, was now far out of the jurisdiction of the proud Pasha of Smyrna, and Vinton tossed and turned as he thought of the stern chase of the "Conqueror."

"It's a wonderfully close-kept scheme," he mused. "For Van Lennep has poured out money here like water, and we have never broke their lines!"

He was already following Jack Masterson in his hazardous voyage, when a slight tapping aroused his attention. He sprung to the door leading to the servants' rooms. Darkness there and the sound of stentorian snoring.

"It's on the wall!" he whispered, as the tapping seemed to move to the front of his room. Breathlessly he listened, and then in few moments he leaped to the window.

For there was the carefully repeated tapping upon the solid wooden shutters. Pistol in hand, he carefully loosened one of the leaves, and a slender hand was thrust through the opening!

"Agathe!" he whispered.

"My God! You will lose your life!" he gasped, as the woman lightly leaped into the room.

"Listen! I have but a moment! You are a gentleman, an English Lord! I have been whipped like a hound by this galley slave Bouclair! I have sworn to have his heart's blood! But, first, to ruin them! I know all his schemes! The cargo on the 'Alessandro Cornaro' is all false, counterfeit, worthless! They intend to wreck this ship between Malta and Gibraltar! They only stop at Malta to see the insurance is safe in London! Seventy thousand pounds on the cargo, thirty thousand on the ship, and they have already got forty thousand pounds advances on the goods. 'Sassoon and Company' are to be swindled! Schnorr of London is one of them—the robbers, 'Komanos and Company!'"

"What is the cargo?" whispered Vinton.

"The oil barrels are filled with water, the opium cases with bricks, the valonia is forest bark, worthless; the raisin boxes are filled with wooden blocks; the figs are old refuse, for imitation coffee making; the sultanines are rotten trash! Notify the British Consul!

"Have the ship seized at Malta or Gibraltar, and thwart the vile swindle! Let a war ship follow them! Now, I am revenged, for these laughing scoundrels stood by and saw Bouclair beat me! There are fifty men here who raised five hundred pounds each for this swindle, and they have been all repaid from the advances. Expose them—see the British admiral! *The swindle is on the London insurance companies!*

"Schnorr got all the bills of lading, except a few little ones, and after Bouclair is ruined, if he does not go to the galleys, I swear by the God above I will kill him, and then myself. Watch over yourself night and day! Go to the consulate. Bouclair will find a sure way to murder you! Now, I go!"

She had cowered in his arms, shivering as she told her story. "I will protect you! I will take you to the consulate and send you safely out!" he whispered.

"Ah!" she cried, "I am a homeless devil! I only live for revenge! If I kill Bouclair, then Nicolo is free! Poor Dimitri! This devil holds him under the grip of the law for killing the Bimbashi!"

"Then, I will stay near you, Agathe, and save you!" gasped Vinton, "for you have been brave and true." With an appealing gesture, she pointed to the window. "It is my life! *Save it now!*"

The young man swung the shutter. Fearless as a chamois, the desperate woman sprang out on the ledge and was instantly lost in the darkness. Howard Vinton stood transfixed at the window, till a hollow tapping on the wall told him all was well!

His brain was whirling. He barred the solid shutters and lit his light. Carefully opening the door to Foley's room, he roused the Sergeant.

"Hush!" he cried. "Come in and help me dress.

Rouse the man!" And he then dragged the astonished Sergeant into his room. "Get your own clothes on! Get your arms and take a stout club. We have got to go to the consulate."

In five minutes they passed out into the hall. The lazy guard was lying across Agathe Mitis' door, sound asleep, and they gained the ground floor without arousing him.

A light shone still from the cafe, and a servant peered out. "Give us a couple of brandies and sodas," demanded Vinton. "I must go and see the English doctor." As the two men gained the street, Vinton paused to see the windows of Agathe Mitis' rooms, all darkened in gloomy silence.

A carriage rattled up as the two men shrank back into a shadow. Emile Bouclair, chanting old cafe refrains, rolled out, drunken and laughing, and essayed the entrance with unsteady steps.

"You brute!" growled Vinton. "Here goes for the first nail in your coffin!"

He waited long enough to see the three rooms above lit up, and then led the astounded Foley around a corner. The Sergeant was at last satisfied of his master's sanity.

"I have business with Consul Fitzgerald—affairs of life and death!" he whispered, as the two men plodded along, club and revolver in hand, treading on frowsy curs and sleeping porters.

"Better take to the open road; it is safer," said the Sergeant, and then the night wanderers lit the cigars which indicated two Europeans "on guard" and watchful.

The leaden waters plashed against the lonely quay as they strode along, a star or two relieving the darkness of the small hours. Howard Vinton's excitement had taken away his reasoning powers.

It then flashed over him that the advances obtained from Sassoon & Company were obtained by fraudulent means. "They are a superb firm of world-famous merchants, and this Schnorr is probably only the

dummy agent! The insurances, too, were gained by fraud! Ah! Now I have you on the hip, Mr. Bouclair!"

It came suddenly to Vinton that he, alone, had discovered the mysterious secret which Fitzgerald and Van Lennep had failed to unearth. "It makes Drage the Chief Inspector for life—and—it gives to me the right to demand my own reward!" The night breezes seemed to whisper "Lily Arnot!" He reflected, "But the 'Conqueror' has already sailed."

The young man puzzled till they reached the consul's gate. Then he entered triumphant, while Foley roused the gate-keeper, and they were admitted.

Maurice Fitzgerald sprang up to hear Howard Vinton's strange request. "I must ask you to send three cipher dispatches at once! Not a moment's delay! One to the Governor of Malta, for Captain Drage; one to Lloyds' agent at Malta, and one to my old friend John Higginbotham, Royal Exchange, London. All to be repeated back!"

"I can send for the operator to come here," said the Consul, "and you can go with him and see it done. I'll send my own clerk, as I have a right to send all government dispatches at any hour of the day or night. What's your news?"

"There's a human life in danger, and my honor as a man compels me to seal my lips!" gravely said the American; "but rest assured we have got them in the toils now!" and the excited young lover never closed an eye that night. For he slept not until he had received the return acknowledgment of the messages.

There was a haggard gleam in his eyes as he wandered around for four days after the night visit of the desperate woman. But a smile of victory wreathed his lips when he read a dispatch brought by the Consul in person. Its words, dated Malta, were brief, but they avenged Agathe in her helplessness.

"Following on. Jack Masterson is here—sails to Gibraltar to-morrow. You have won the day! Wait and watch. Drage."

And, by dint of watching, he found a safe chance to whisper one day to Agathe the Serpent, as she listlessly mounted the grand staircase. Her eyes were downcast, for now she followed Bouclair in and out like a mute spaniel; but the gleam of those despairing, downcast eyes held the suspended death of the lightning's bolt.

She was only biding her own time, and nursing the wrath to come! The sad-eyed Van Lennep soberly informed the young American that he had received dispatches of a secret nature bidding him now abandon all further action in the matter of "Komanos and Company."

For now the white-hulled "Conqueror" was gliding along the Mediterranean and never losing sight of the lumbering "Cornaro" as she neared the Balearic Islands. There was a little official by-play at Malta, which had given to the Governor all the secrets of the dozen telegrams exchanged with London and Smyrna by Captain Demitri Nicolo.

When, eight days later, the "Alessandro Cornaro" dragged into port heavily along under the shadows of the great rock, Captain Nicolo was raging at heart, as he bade his own boat be cleared away.

For the great fleet white steam yacht had ceaselessly dogged him every league from Malta, running along between the freighter and the nearest shore, like a hawk hovering around a crippled bird.

"Is it madness, is it a dream, this white devil?" foamed the baffled Nicolo, as the snaky beauty ran along seeking the naval anchorage. "Some fiend of hell has set this fellow on to dog us!

"And he flies the flag of the Royal Yacht Squadron! Perhaps a naval dispatch boat in disguise. Our plan has failed! I must wait." A "Gib" cutter raced out, when the port boarding boat slowly labored along, and then, slowly drifting past, a weighted package was tossed on the "Cornaro's" deck.

Nicolo himself grasped it, and his face paled as he read the lines of a dispatch;

"Our enterprise now impossible. We are watched here night and day. You are followed. Do nothing but coal, and come on straight. Anchor at the Downs. Don't enter the Thames. Tug there to meet you with secret orders. We have been betrayed."

The signature "Schnorr" told the ominous story of the ruin of "Komanos and Company"—and Enos Drage was already in London—on the watch! Greek had met Greek, and the Gibraltar port authorities were ready to seize the ship!

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTAIN ENOS DRAGE MAKES A MORNING VISIT!—A STRANGE CRAFT AT GRAVESEND!

Captain Dimitri Nicolo stood at the companion way of the "Alessandro Cornaro" with a scowling face and black murder in his heart. He had called Sandy McGregor to his side to act as interpreter.

"Just tell these fellows we have put in here for coal and orders—that's all. I'll go on shore and make my declarations and see our agent! Who in h—ll could have betrayed us? There's your English chum, the head stoker?"

"Pooh!" replied the chief engineer. "Jack Masterson was tipsy at Malta, that's all! Those Maltese girls are witches! He will tumble along here on the next boat. He knows that we coal here." "I wish he would come; he would be useful now, then," said the mollified Nicolo.

After the customs boat had left, Captain Nicolo eyed the Bay of Algesiras, with its oblong pond eight miles by five.

The anchorage was crowded with vessels, and, nearest of all, lay his enemy, the graceful white steam yacht, her fires banked. There was a pretty steam launch

now tossing by her side gangway, and a regular man o' war's watch kept on her deck.

"We are in a hole here, Sandy, a regular trap!" growled Dimitri Nicolo. "I am only safe while on the ship. I need you here for the machinery. There's the devil of a white witch that has hung around us since we passed Andro and Nicaria!

"Now, that sneaking devil Van Lennep has set them on! His heart's blood shall pay for it! Come down in the cabin and we will have a talk. I have a dispatch to show you!"

Old Sandy McGregor was eyeing the grim hill of Tarik, for twelve hundred years the fortified gate of the Mediterranean.

"There's no use to flinch now, Dimitri," he said. "We are under the guns of the fortress. We must be bold, and yet wise! D—n it all! I passed a dozen places where I could have easily settled her down in ten fathoms in half an hour by just hauling out the sea-plug! Did you notice that white witch has followed us by the chart? Whenever we got on to soundings, she always ran in between us and the bank.

"It's the old turn of luck! We've done the trick three times, you and I, and have always collected the money with no trouble. Now, I have a plan of my own! Let's coal up here and go out easily to the end of the strait! We've got a six-mile back current running in from the Atlantic.

"There's nothing but that one white specter to hurt us! Keep cool! When we run out I will see that the 'Cornaro' is fired at a dozen places in the hold! The oil aboard will be a good excuse!

"You can have the boats all ready, and let her drift back burning in full sight of the town. We can take to the boats and land at Ceuta! There will be no fear these fellows will tow her in for fear of firing the shipping! And I'll pull the sea plug when I set her on fire, and she'll blow up soon enough!" Dimitri Nicolo turned a despairing face towards him.

"I dare not! Read that! Schnorr orders me to come on to the Downs!"

"Well! D—n my eyes!" roared McGregor.

"But he has some foxy plan already! He has heard from our spies here and at Malta! I wish that we knew!" "So do I," snarled Nicolo; "but I am now afraid to risk you or myself on shore."

He was sweeping the strand of the basin with his glasses. The three tiers of houses rose up under the gray hill, where the wild game hides among the straggling shrubs, grassy patches and cave honey-combed sides of the huge rock, which has been four times taken and three times withstood an overwhelming array of foes.

"They may be afraid to come out to us!" said Nicolo. "There's that blamed white ghost of a yacht! By Heavens! If I caught her in the Greek sea I'd board her and cut the throat of the last mother's son! Yes! Some one on shore is watching our agents, and this fellow will watch us! We are in a hole!"

"There's a boat coming with one man in it!" suddenly cried McGregor, and the two men waited in suspense till stout Jack Masterson pulled alongside, looking weary and unkempt. "What the deuce have you been up to?" growled the enraged Greek.

"I got left behind at Malta only by five minutes," faltered the sturdy prodigal. "I've had a mighty rough time! I stoked my way with a coal shovel to join you here. If you don't want me, I can get a ship home here and have a good job. I'll take my kit off the boat," he defiantly said.

"Go down to the steward quick and get a good meal!" sullenly said Captain Nicolo. "I need you here, and I will pay you well if you only let rum alone. Fix yourself up decently! I want you to go on shore to see my agents. How much coal do we want?"

"Three hundred tons," carelessly said Jack Masterson, as he lounged up to McGregor. "Let me have ten pounds, Sandy!" he said. "I am hard up!"

"Be ready in half an hour! I'll send my cutter and

tow your boat back," said Nicolo, and he dragged the old conspirator away to the cabin.

"I think that I see daylight now ahead," chuckled Jack Masterson, as he regaled himself in the mess-room. "And Mary Horton will pull the old boat in, hand over hand!" He was quite a respectable object when he reappeared on deck.

Busy in the captain's room he could see the two agents of Komanos and Company laying their heads together. It was the cautious Scot who dissuaded the fiery Greek corsair from any rash attempt!

"You see, Schnorr himself has got ten thousand pounds in this venture and an English prison to face! He will have his own crafty plans all laid! We have 'obeyed orders' to the hair! We have been driven past Sicily, Sardinia, the Balearic Islands, and even Cartagena, where we have our local friends, by that cursed yacht! She goes three leagues to our one, and probably has a couple of little rifle-guns aboard and fifty stand of repeaters! We might all get hung for piracy!

"Now, here's Jack Masterson, who is as honest as the edge of a sword! Give him your dispatches to Schnorr and to Bouclair, and let him send them. Keep dark as to the agents here! Just send them a letter for the three hundred tons of coal. Slap that on board. Keep your mouth shut here! For if we are carefully watched at sea, we are doubly watched on shore! We must now play the 'innocence act!'

"Fix up your cipher dispatch and tell Schnorr to send you an open dispatch to coal and proceed to Gravesend. We will busy the crew and put the old boat in good shape."

The two partners in crime watched Jack Masterson sweep away in great dignity with the letter and dispatches. "It was a lucky hit for us that he came on after us," said Nicolo, "for now, we are clear of all these Gibraltar agents! There's no one here to turn against us. He will get the cipher answers addressed to him!"

The captain and McGregor proceeded to make a

comfortable night of it. It was ten o'clock before Masterson returned.

"Everything is ship-shape!" he reported to McGregor. "The barges will be alongside at daybreak, and they say they will fill our bunkers in two days." He threw down a bundle of letters.

"By the way, Captain," he said, "that steam launch of the yacht is slowly circling around the 'Cornaro' on a regular watch! She made three circles while I was rowing off shore!"

The two frightened rascals sought the deck. "Ah! Corpo di Baceo!" snarled Nicolo in a mad rage. "If I dared—"

"Just keep cool," snorted old McGregor. "Let them circle and be blowed! You see they dare not come on board! Keep your head and we will be off soon. Everything is all right!"

And so Jack Masterson flattered himself as he stowed himself away in his snug bunk that night. "Great guns! Won't old Enos dance a jig when he gets my dispatches, and has also the copies of Nicolo's telegrams!"

The old man o' war's man rejoiced in a crisp fifty-pound note handed him by Lloyds' agent, who grimly smiled when Masterson secretly reported to him.

"My boy!" said the agent, "we have got hold of these fellows' cipher now, and Van Lennep, Drage and Lloyds' committee will have everything run over the wires to them at once.

"The Lords of Admiralty would have justified us in seizing this ship here! But we will let the 'Alessandro Cornaro' go ahead and finish up her voyage, just to teach 'Komanos and Company' a lesson in purse and person! They are in the toils now. They can't escape us. I want you to stick to this boat as long as she flies the black circle and the K!

"Then, if you work any more after you've finished this cruise, it will be only from choice. For we'll chase her to Kamchatka, but we ruin them! We have them in the net!

"This game young American, Vinton, at Smyrna, has stumbled on the key of the mystery! And old 'Shun Lee' Drage has sharpened his fangs! He is a sea wolf and a hold-fast to the death!"

Jack Masterson paused in his self-gratulations to grumble, "It's mighty hard lines that I can't take a drop, but, by hokey, if these fellows would catch me betraying them, they would ram me into the furnace of the 'Cornaro!' But, wait till I strike Southsea!"

And then the old sea dog placidly called up the waiting Mary Horton as a fetich of delight!

When Enos Drage had turned the fleet "Conqueror" over to Hozier at the departure of the "Alessandro Cornaro" from Malta, he pondered long over the strange speculations of Komanos and Company while voyaging alone as far as Marseilles. On the Messagerie Maritimes boat he calmly reviewed the whole situation.

"I have the prize of my life, the Chief Inspectorship, now under my very hand, if Hozier only dogs that will o' the wisp boat safely to Gibraltar!" With a delicious sense of power he now ruminated upon all the legal steps he would take at London. Mesh by mesh the net had closed around the "Alessandro Cornaro."

"Brave fellow is Vinton, a perfect brick! What in heaven's name can I do to reward him!" The old sea dog was as yet unconscious that Howard Vinton proposed to reward himself in kind by accepting "The Child" as a full payment of all his arduous services! He was unaware, too, that his escort of the "Cornaro" through the Greek sea had caused Captain Nicolo to run in to Malta for orders, and so had thrown Jack Masterson into his own hands, as a final witness of the unlawful voyage of the giant tramp.

Drage had telegraphed back to Vinton to guard Agathe's secret as inviolable. "I'm not going to give the Secret Committee this tip! I'll just get the 'order of arrest' and then spring my tableau at the right time!"

Captain Enos halted at Paris only long enough to

ascertain that the "Cornaro" was now coaled up and ready to sail for London direct. When he had "filled his lockers" with Paris trifles for Miss Lavinia and "The Child," he ran down to Havre.

"If I ever get faithful old Jack Masterson by the fin again, he shall know what I think of him!" mused Enos as he grimly smiled at the little four-foot customs Frenchman tossing his traps aboard the channel steamer.

For, sturdy old John Higginbotham had telegraphed to Havre to the agent of Lloyds to inform "Shun Lee" Drage that the cipher was at last conquered and that, thanks to Jack, they had now tapped Schnorr's secret orders, which read, "to come on to the Downs, without accident," and there await the firm's tug!

"Glory!" cried the happy retired captain, "I'll have a smart fishing boat and dance around the tramp when she comes to anchor, and then, too, our own secret police will shadow every one who goes out on the tug!

"And, so far, Bouclair seemingly trusts all to Schnorr! How in the deuce did Jack Masterson get at the cipher?"

Drage could not believe how lynx-like on the watch Jack Masterson had hovered around the two drunken conspirators at Gibraltar till he had found the key of the code transposition lying on the table where big Sandy McGregor snored away in the happy Nirvana of a drunkard's heaven!

Captain Dimitri Nicolo was obliged to trust his rubicund chief engineer as a fellow criminal in handling the troublesome cable code. He dared not trust his own broken English. With perfect insular calmness, Enos Drage drove direct to Morley's Hotel, and was engaged in discussing his chops and a pot of bitter when the members of the Secret Committee came one by one to his lair.

"Well, Mr. Chief Inspector!" laughed Higginbotham, "you had better run down to Southsea for a day or so and try to calm their frightened ladies! I've

had a dozen requests from them already for news! Then, get back to us here! You must not even approach the Royal Exchange. The whole Levantine fruit trade is in a wild fever of speculation over this enormous coming cargo, and spies, brokers and agents are swarming around." We have, however, a dozen Scotland Yard men watching Schnorr and Company, —and, by the way, Messrs. Sassoon and Company have been dragged into the ownership of a great quantity of the opium cargo.

"Enos, you had better come back and stay at my house!" smiled Higginbotham, "we've got these fellows securely trapped, and I want your welcoming dinner on your Chief Inspector's appointment to be given there. You must not lose the 'Cornaro' an instant from sight, though—from the very moment she anchors!"

"What can I do for Vinton?" mused Enos Drage, as he left the triumphant committee after an hour's seance. He pondered over this all the way to sunny Southsea, where the April buds were breaking on the leafy trees.

It was midnight when he reached his own home.

"Bless me, Lily! What's this? Tears?" the astonished veteran cried, as the beautiful girl clung to his breast sobbing. "They will kill him! Why did you not bring him?" the blushing maiden faltered.

"Bring—bring who?"

"Howard!" faltered "The Child," as she fled away to her fastness, the little room where her silent heart always kept a loving watch over the young vedette on duty in the Orient.

"God bless my soul! You'll bring him back soon enough!" smiled the astounded veteran, a light breaking in upon his darkened mind!

"That's the way the breeze blows,—now,—is it?"

And he had secretly made it up with Miss Lavinia before he went to his lair.

"You see, I owe the whole thing to him! He's a most gallant fellow!"

"But, he is not in Her Majesty's Service!" mourned the stern Lavinia.

"He's in Lily's service, that's better!" heartily said Drage, as he took up his bed candlestick, and plodded upstairs, dreaming of his many traps now set for "Komanos and Company."

He proposed to confer with Miss Lavinia further as regarded "The Child's" strange cardiac agitation!

Captain Enos Drage rejoiced when he opened his eyes and saw the neatly shaven lawns of Southsea, and the familiar faces thronging the Marine Parade.

"Nothing like old England!" he joyously cried, gazing at the superb marine panorama of the Solent.

He leisurely made his breakfast, and, by eleven o'clock, had arranged all his personal affairs for an absence of a month.

The stern Lavinia's brief account of her stewardship, and her martial report of the household garrison's doings was most satisfactory.

"Here's my address for all wires and letters. Higginbotham's house. I take the evening train up, and then I will need all my wits about me! Has Lily said anything to you as to her feelings toward our young American friend?"

"Not a word," answered Lavinia. "She is now out shopping!"

"H'm!" slowly said Enos Drage. "I'll have a little talk with her myself when she comes in!"

The old Captain had studied out his whole recondite business plans, over chart and memorandums, before he could corner the graceful Miss Lily, who seemed to evade him, in a most elusive manner, on this pleasant afternoon.

With a recognition of Miss Lavinia, as a slightly adverse influence, old "Shun Lee" succeeded at last in convoying "The Child" out for a walk! There was a downcast shyness in her eyes, a bright, crimson hovering on her cheeks, as they finally rested, by the throbbing sea, having duly noted the familiar array of bathing houses, pleasure boats, children at play on the long

brown beach, and the furtive assaults of the natty Tommy Atkins upon the peace of mind of the pretty nurse girls.

Drage noted with pride the substantial array of ships and, land defenses, and casting a mute look of defiance toward the shores of hostile France, he slowly turned his dreamy eyes from the sea horizon to the blushing girl at his side.

"I wanted to ask you, Lily, how far this thing has gone on between you and young Vinton! Lavinia tells me that he writes you regularly!"

"There's nothing to tell as yet, Uncle Enos," the girl faltered, with her sparkling eyes following a dashing yacht, now sweeping on gallantly toward that Mecca of yachtsmen, Cowes harbor!

"But, I think it is simply awful—just horrid—that Howard should be left alone there, out in the East,—facing hidden dangers—the Aleppo plague, and all that —just for other people's money!"

Her little arched foot was tapping the graveled walk most impatiently.

"We busy men spend all our lives fighting 'for other people's money,'" replied the veteran, "either in guarding it, or trying to get at it!"

"But the whole benefit of this struggle comes at last to you!" mutinously said "The Child," "and Howard gets nothing, absolutely nothing!" she said, grinding her little boot-heel viciously down into the sand.

"He will—*in time!*" dryly said the old officer, as he touched his cap to the moving procession of retired Admirals, Generals, Judges, and all those who have put the armor off.

"Of course, I know; but he never would have gone out there but for me!" softly said "The Child," with the faint glow of a triumphant smile on her sea-shell cheeks. "I want you to know this! Aunt Lavinia does not know it. But I wanted you to get this Inspectorship,—and, I made Howard go! Yes! I made him go!"

"Has he spoken to you yet?" feebly cross-questioned Enos. "How do you know that he loves you?"

"He has not spoken, but I know—all that I care to know! I am sure—yes, sure—that he loves me! And, —here you are safely back, and he is alone out there, and—in great danger!"

There was the shadow of unshed tears in the girl's beautiful eyes.

"Do you love him, my dear Little One?" said the old sailor.

"I want you to help me, that's all!" said Lily, vaguely, as she rose and drew a cabalistic figure in the gravel with the ferrule of her sunshade. "It is all so strange! I have no mother, you know! And,—Aunt Lavinia does not understand!"

"There, my dearest! It will come out all right! Just you trust to me! Aunt Lavinia will do as I wish! Leave it all to me! Now, let us go back, for I must be off to London!" said the old man, touched at heart by the orphan's appeal.

"And you promise me?" the glowing girl said.

"I promise!" the veteran replied, vaguely feeling that he had forever committed himself, now, to what he afterward designated as "the whole programme."

And so there was the peace of a great love and a mutual trust between the gnarled and battered old veteran and the beautiful girl, as they slowly returned to St. Aubrey's Villa.

Miss Lavinia, now at the helm of domestic affairs, eyed the couple keenly, but she was fain to be content when Enos said, "I would just leave that little matter to run on, quietly! I would leave these young people entirely to themselves. We will see what comes, with time!"

Miss Lavinia softly sighed as she recognized as final her stern old brother's decision to leave the Lily of Southsea a certain "free will" in the disposition of her own charming self for the future which still lay before her, rich with all its golden possibilities of life and love.

Uncle Enos Drage drove away, stout hearted, to his coming battle with Komanos and Company, realizing that the fighting would soon be on! He had written a careful dispatch to Howard Vinton, begging him to be wary. "Watch over Van Lennep! Keep your eyes on him, and warn him! These fellows know now that they are being cornered closely, and they may strike back sharply at Van Lennep! They naturally will give him all the credit of running them down! I rely, however, on you and your prudence in all! These men will be simply desperate when I head them off here, and you must wait on guard at Smyrna till I have either seized the ship or else driven them to bay!"

The old man dreamed of the future glories of the Chief Inspectorship, and realized the truth that the "bread of love cast upon the waters of the past years had returned again!" For he knew now, that gentle Lily Arnot had sent her own knight errant out to battle for her own sweet sake! "I will owe it to them both—and surely they must have their reward!"

That night the girl, happy at heart, indited a dispatch of unusual inflammability to her absent suitor, while the softened Lavinia sat alone in her room, wistfully regarding the faded portrait of the handsome naval Lieutenant who had died so long ago, under the flag, out in Burmah!

"He is about the same age!" the spinster faltered, and all the tenderness of the loyal faith which she had borne to her own lover, in those months of waiting for the absent, caused her awakened heart to beat in sympathy for the motherless child!

Lily Arnot knew when she met her aunt the next morning in the unusual demonstration of diurnal affection, that the dead had been speaking for the living!

"It will be all right, my dear child," the fatled lady said, and she vowed that at least one woman of the fighting Drage blood should be happy. Her own loveless life all rose up before her now, in its long, silent, lonely vistas, and she saw again the face of the pale loving mother who was cut off in her youth, in the

very dewy freshness of the unfolding rose of Life! And her aged heart bloomed out again in roses of Love!

It was on the third day after the "Alessandro Cornaro" had cast her anchor under the shadows of Gibraltar, and that Jack Masterson had reported "full bunkers," when Captain Nicolo and his Italian first officer, Corvini, were glowering from the stern at the still motionless white yacht.

"Get up steam slowly," growled Dimitri Nicolo to the now sullen McGregor. "I want to watch that sneaking English spy boat. If she gets up her steam to follow us out, by Jove, I'll just run her down and turn her over on her anchor cables! I'll take the wheel myself!"

The desperate Greek and his angry Italian mate had stealthily watched the slow circling of the steam launch picket-boat for night after night! And all Nicolo's secret intercourse with his agents, all his bribing of boatmen merely told him that it was the English private yacht "Conqueror!"

But no gay pleasure party made merry on its decks! No laughing garrison ladies waved their nodding plumes in merry victory on the stranger's snowy decks. Only a stern bearded officer—his blue cap, gold-banded—walked the hostile "Conqueror's" decks on watch!

A hairy-breasted old quartermaster had boldly run the picket-launch a dozen times a day around the "Cornaro" at half-pistol shot! Cheerfully unconscious, Jack Masterson had designedly sought the safe retreat of the furnace rooms when the agent's cutter had brought off an open dispatch to proceed to Gravesend "for orders."

All seemed to be perfectly tranquil in the harbor!

"Gran Dio!" muttered Nicolo, "if I dared but to go on shore and rake up some of the old boys! I'd pay this 'white wolf' off."

But the fear of the British Lion, "couchant, regardant," deterred the fearful Nicolo!

"The whole thing is here together in their power,

ship and cargo. If I set foot on shore, Basta!—they might detain me, and then trap me with their crooked admiralty law!"

And so, all hands curiously watched the "Conqueror," as the black smoke of departure poured out of the funnels of the great tramp. There had been no positive interference beyond the white boat's menacing police patrol.

And yet, in Dimitri Nicolo's heart, an unknown fear always lurked now,—an uneasiness as to the final outcome which he could not explain! In vain he had sent the willing Jack Masterson on shore! The secret friends who now dared not approach the Levantine argosy only sent out a brief, hurry dispatch from London when Nicolo had reported by telegraph his sailing hour!

And Smyrna was most ominously silent!

"What the deuce is up now with Emile Bouclair! Has luck turned at last!" growled the Greek. "Wait till I smuggle Agathe away to a safe place. If the Captain of the 'Apollo' does not fail me, I will yet settle my personal account with that French brute! I'll strike as soon as this run is safe! If I can not reach him,—then my old felucca mates can! And then, Komanos and Company will have a new Secretary!"

There was not a sign of life on the yacht "Conqueror" as the "Cornaro" swept along, forging slowly ahead in the adverse current, and passed her silent enemy, at a mere cable's length! Not a feather of blue smoke floated out from the two brass-cased steel funnels. Even the hated steam launch now drifted idly astern of the anchored yacht.

"We are free of this spying fellow at last!" chuckled Sandy McGregor to Jack Masterson, as the "Alessandro Cornaro" drove slowly along toward Cape Tarifa! Jack was in a most happy mood!

He had dispatched a letter to Mary Horton which was calculated to arouse an unwonted agitation in the maid's plump bodice, and arouse her hopes of a ma-

terial happiness to be realized in the near future. He had successfully eluded every suspicion so far!

"My eyes! won't they just dance in the morning!" he muttered. But he stuffed his pipe and gazed quietly at a neat little two-thousand ton freighter running smoothly along, lingering between the "Cornaro" and the rock! "That fellow will surely beat us two days to the Lizard!" he remarked to McGregor.

"Yes," said the Chief, lowering his glass. "She's a good type, neat loaded, and, I guess, a fast fruit boat!"

"Safe enough!" laughed Masterson, as he turned in for a nap.

He had his coal-shovelers all now in a wholesome awe of "il grau Inglese!"

There was a stern-faced man left behind, standing on the poop deck of the "Conqueror," who watched the "Cornaro" labor along against the tide. Colonel Hozier laughed heartily as the huge tramp disappeared from his view.

"Signor Capitano Dimitri Nicolo!" he said. "You will surely miss the 'Conqueror' on your run around Spain, but the 'Scottish Chief' will show you the same courtesies of the high seas, or else,—I'm a land lubber!"

He turned away with a smile to his deck officer. "Anson!" said he, "I'll give you a silver loving cup if you can beat the record to Marseilles! I've got a sudden fit of homesickness, and I want to hear the sound of Bow Bells as soon as I can."

And so all hands sprung to their work to make steam, for but one man held the secret of the strange dallying cruise in his bosom!

Colonel Hozier proposed at once to reinforce the Secret Committee of Lloyds, which was now eagerly awaiting the arrival of Enos Drage to plant him as a marine picket, on the Goodwin Sands.

"It's a case of Greek and Greek," roared Hozier. "This Corsair captain will find the black-hulled 'Scot-

tish Chief' clinging just as closely to him as my own white sea-bird 'Conqueror!'

"Messrs. Komanos and Company! You are checkmated!"

He waved a parting blessing to the British flag on the rock, as the "Conqueror" leapt away like a frightened greyhound.

All that live-long night, the Greek captain and his Italian mate watched the red and green lights of their sea companion, "Scottish Chief," with a growing anxiety. At daybreak, Nicolo, with a haggard face, roused up the half-inebriated Sandy McGregor.

"See here!" he shouted. "You told me that boat was surely going two knots to our one as we passed out of the straits! There she is now,—not a single league away! What does it mean?"

Tomasso Corvini answered his officer at once, while the big Scotchman's heart sank within him.

"She has carefully waited on us the whole night!" the Italian muttered. "Yes! and she's only moving along at half-speed now, to dog us as far as Gravesend," yelled McGregor, with a curse.

"We may all run into quod the very moment we strike English waters! That fellow is a spy! He, too, has got the tip!"

The old Scotch adventurer sought the easy comfort of the bottle.

"Our cake is dough on this unlucky run!" he growled. And then he began to wonder if Bouclair had not sold them out!

It was four days before the lumbering freighter ran into the choppy seas of the English Channel, and when she stole along past the Goodwin Sands and anchored safely on the Downs,—the "Scottish Chief" neatly dropped two anchors and moored not five hundred fathoms away!

There was a fresh breeze now roughening the Channel, and the guns of Deal, Dover and Sandown Castles all covered with a crossfire, the smooth expanse of still water within the banks, where for a thousand

years the treacherous "Goodwins" have claimed their prey!

Four men were gathered together as the mist swept around the "Cornaro," hiding all the chalk cliffs.

It was the secret council of Nicolo and his astonished subordinates.

"There is either a traitor on board, or else the devil has broken loose out of hell!" fumed the Greek. "Here I am,—in a hole,—with not a single word of orders, and the night coming on! Bank your fires!" he cried, turning to Jack.

"Come down into my cabin, McGregor! I want you to help me out here!"

There was all the ferocity of a wounded tiger in the Greek's foaming rage!

Jack Masterson was very glad to get out of the danger zone, and to dive below to execute the Captain's last orders.

"Do they really suspect me? If so, good-bye, Mary Horton!" he murmured, but as he gazed out helplessly over the vessel's quarter, he soon saw a trawling boat dash by in the fresh breeze, and, under sou'westers and a big fisherman hooded oil-skin hat,—the weather beaten features of Captain Enos Drage shone out!

"By Gad! The old man's at the tiller himself! And he has the light of battle on his face!"

All fear now vanished from Jack Masterson's breast in a trice!

"I swear old 'Shun Lee' looks as if he would storm the ship before morning! He can't even wait for his prey to come into the Thames! Once inside,—we are all likely to be soon in the clutches of Her Majesty's Customs Officers!"

He stole a glance at the waters, now half-veiled with a creeping mist, and saw near by a battered little steam tug, creeping down on the "Alessandro Cornaro."

"Ah! Now I know! Drage is only piping off these fellows. He will let them make the game! And,—its all up,—the very moment this insurance is void, when we cross the line of the Nore! It is death to 'Komanos

and Company' when we reach the voyage's end—Gravesend! These scoundrels are simply dished! But who the dickens is on the tug?"

For private reasons, Jack Masterson did not reappear on deck, but when his orders to bank the fires were all duly under way, he sought a snug place below decks, where he could gaze out unperceived.

The fisher trawling boat was leisurely knocking about in the vicinity, and the little tug had at last steamed up to the quickly lowered gangway!

"I'll keep shady! Mum's the word, unless Mary Horton's husband will be married with his throat slit! There's no safety in fooling with Captain Nicolo, now!"

Chief Engineer Sandy McGregor had listened to the maddened Greek's outpouring. He coolly said, "You are in charge as yet! Dimitri! I can't advise you now! All I can do is to tell you not to venture to cross the customs line at Gravesend! You are now cut off between two fires here! If you are in any way unfortunate here on the Downs,—then your insurance is void! You can't stay here forever and risk bad weather! The very moment the pilot and customs officer board you at Gravesend, then—you are just as helpless as a child! These fellows up in London have probably made some new plan for us,—all that you can do is to wait."

He glanced out of the cabin door,—"Holy Smoke! There's Schnorr himself!"

And then he rose and waddled out, as the anxious face of a burly man of middle age appeared at the door. "Here! Nicolo! Every moment is precious! Get your wits together and lock the door!" the newcomer sharply said, "I may, even now, be too late! The sly Custom House fellows may be on board here any moment! Have you been boarded as yet?"

Nicolo gruffly shook his head.

"I've only obeyed your orders! Here I am, and,—you know the rest!"

"Get me a glass of brandy! I'm wet to the bone!

All may be well yet, but you've got to mind your eye! A single mistake will do us out of a hundred and forty thousand pounds!"

In the cold drizzle of a murky night, Jack Masterson crept up close to the Captain's cabin window. There were the two rascals with their heads very near together, fighting hard now to take the "Cornaro" out of "Shun Lee" Drage's trap!

He slipped around the silent decks. And the nearest cheering thing that he saw, was the red and green light of the "Scottish Chief" as she slowly swung with the tide!

"Blast my eyes! They have nicely sewed us up!" laughed Jack, "and,—I shouldn't wonder if old Drage was roosting up above us on the main truck! We won't be lonely any more!"

He decided that the nearness of Dover Castle now justified him in joining McGregor in a quiet little jollification over their safe arrival in the Downs!

In default of a "Black-Eyed Susan," the two mariners toyed with the magic black bottle.

"Where do we go in the morning?" hazarded Jack.

"Oh!" laughed the old Silenus. "Anywhere from Teneriffe to Tampico! From Cronstadt to Coromandel! Nicolo is closeted with that bullet-headed Dutchman Schnorr now, and I've a notion that he'd like very much to cut stick and clear out! You'd better stick to the ship, Jack! Don't leave me here, a poor devil in trouble! I'll see that Nicolo squares you out in great shape!"

"Count on me, Sandy!" cheerily said the old man-o'-wars-man. "I never go back on an old shipmate!"

Mr. Jack Masterson realized that he was cooped up alone on the ownerless ship, with twenty-five angry cutthroats.

"It's a rum old lay out! Nobody seems to know who runs the ship or owns the cargo, or what's up from day to day!" said Jack, filling the chief's glass.

"We're free of the whole ocean with Komanos and Company behind us!" cheerily said McGregor.

"There's more than one way to skin a cat! Old Schnorr is just as smart as chain lightning! He will find the way out!"

It was four o'clock, and the wet fogs wrapped the dreary waters when Sandy McGregor's heavy hand roused Jack Masterson, chief stoker of the diligently pursued ocean tramp.

"Show a leg, Jack!" bawled McGregor. "Get up steam as quick as you can; we are going to crawl up to Gravesend now! I've had a hard night of it! Old Schnorr and Nicolo have been pumping me with regard to our crew! Schnorr swears that we have either a traitor or a Jonah on board!"

"Nonsense," sleepily said Jack. "Your enemies are all at Smyrna! It's the deuced Syrians, these peddlers who are afraid this enormous cargo will break down the market for Levantine products,—and, so, they will try and get you in all sorts of trouble till they have first cleared out their own consignments!"

"By Heaven! You may be right!" growled McGregor. "I'll post Schnorr on this. But they trust no one now. They got me dead drunk, and I woke up with my own pockets all turned inside out! The 'old man' is going off on the tug to Dover with Schnorr and Tom Corvini will then take this old tub up to Gravesend. The skipper and Schnorr are going to put up some kind of a new job in London!"

"Most likely they will telegraph to Smyrna for orders!" growled Masterson, as he hobbled away, thanking his stars that he possessed no single scrap of incriminating paper! "Shun Lee" Drage's words returned; sage words of warning!—"Say what you please to man or woman alone, but never put a word in writing!"

When Jack had set his fires aglow, he tumbled up for a breath of fresh air.

The trawling smack was anchored not a hundred yards away, and he saw old Enos Drage indulging in a morning scrub of his shining red bald head. The harsh snort of a little tug aroused all hands, and Jack

grinned as a couple of Jersey fishermen on the trawl began to trip their anchor.

"Who's that man?" snorted Agent Schnorr, as Jack leaned against the rail.

"Only an old chum of mine, whom I picked up at Trieste as my head stoker. I can never manage these beach combers of a fire gang below, alone!" said McGregor.

"He is a dead game man!"

"Then,—" said the mollified Schnorr, "keep him on board. Pay him well;" and he approached big Sandy and whispered, "You may have to make a quick run for it! Hold on to him!"

Before the great bullet-headed, pig-eyed German was housed in the little cabin of the tug, the smart fishing smack was already skimming away to Dover pier.

"Ah! Greek and Greek!" mused Masterson. "I'll warrant now that old 'Shun Lee' Drage beats these two fellows to London, and he'll have a regular cloud of spies and detectives to pipe them off! The fun is just coming on! The ball will open when we strike Gravesend."

"Now, Jack!" cried McGregor, slapping him on the shoulder. "We are ordered to lay here ready till sundown, in waiting for a telegraphic signal. If we get no countermand, then to crawl up to Gravesend with just enough speed to keep her nose out of the bank. We must not get there till nine to-morrow morning!"

"Why?" lazily asked Masterson.

"None of my business, or yours, either!" gruffly said Mc. "Old Schnorr is one of these German Jews who can keep a secret,—especially his own!"

It brought a storm of curses to First Officer Tomaso Corvini's lips when the "Scottish Chief" duly fell in, sailing in the wake of the "Cornaro" at sundown, and so, in procession, they dragged along by Margate, Whitstable and Sheerness, toward Gravesend.

"Blast my eyes!" roared old McGregor. "If we

were not inside the Nore Light now, I would just back down on that black brute and shore him high and dry on the bank! We're in a regular hole, and,—the jig's up!"

With curses loud and deep for the thousands of pounds of insurance money wasted, McGregor dreamed all night that the ship was afire and sinking in the broad Thames Estuary!

He woke with a cold sweat on his brow, in the dim watches of the night!

"I might do it here,—now,—alone!" he whispered, and then he faltered, "Too late! They are 'on to us!' They would simply contest the policies! We must sneak away!"

While the "Alessandro Cornaro" was slowly boring up the muddy Thames towards Gravesend, and the white flag with the black circled "K" gleaming out proudly at the mizzen,—there was an anxious midnight seance at the British Consulate in Smyrna.

Howard Vinton was wearied out with the long suspense of all these dreary days, now stifling in their heat! He marveled not at the silence of Agathe, the Serpent, for Bouclair was now a restless spirit, haunting the corner rooms—even by day. The grim Turkish sentinel, however, still watched the doors of Bouclair's rooms, day and night!

The malevolent old Turkish hag also marched truculently at Agathe's side when she went out, and this only on rare occasions! The thrilling, singing voice was silent! The piano keys were left untouched, for, late at night, the murmur of busy voices in conference was heard in the salon adjoining Vinton's rooms. Messengers came and went at all hours!

There was an open secret on the Exchanges of Smyrna that a feverish agitation marked the London quotations of Levantine goods, and the voices of excitable speculators rose up in a loud chorus in the bazaars and counting rooms of Smyrna! When Enos Drage, still on guard at Dover, had sighted the huge tramp steamer so unwillingly chased into the mouth of the Thames,

Howard Vinton, Fitzgerald and Van Lennep were called into a feverish activity by Drage's warning telegram of the arrival.

The long days had dragged away slowly, and now the three secret friends awaited the momentary news of the seizure of the "Cornaro"!

It was a commendable prudence which brought Van Lennep, wrapped in a Turkish disguise, at night, to land on the mole in front of the Consulate, where the alert Foley was now, always on watch, armed to the teeth. Howard Vinton had openly indulged in some ceremonious festivities with the officers of the English squadron, and his three weeks of idle time had also produced some startling correspondence ornamenting the columns of both the European and American issues of the New York Herald.

In vain, a dozen dashingly veiled Fatimas had tempted the wary young Milord with a gracefully lifted yashmak. In vain, the local business gossips had assailed Howard Vinton on the mole,—in the cafes, or even during his brief visits to the noisy gayeties of the "Cafe's chantant."

The young man remained to all an impregnable mystery, and,—even the leaden-eyed Bouclair now classed him merely as a man dawdling along, killing time without a purpose and aimlessly scattering abroad a handsome income.

The generally accepted rumor that "Milord" was a secret agent of the British Government, an aristocratic "incognito," was apparently confirmed by his frequent visits to the British fleet!

The only daily sensation of Smyrna was the rising chatter as to the remarkable voyage of the "Cornaro" and its stiffening effect upon British and Smyrniote speculations. Both Fitzgerald and Vinton shared Van Lennep's wonder at the aimless voyage.

The agent delivered his opinion in these words:

"Here we have the news of the tardy but safe arrival of this cargo. To-morrow the insurance will surely expire, when she drops anchor at Gravesend!

"Someone has certainly expended ten thousand pounds of good cash in this venture, the only result of which is to break prices, ruin consignees, and to entail a vast loss upon the hidden 'Komanos and Company,' and also upon Sassoon and Company,—unless they are well secured for their advances. I am in the dark! There's not a sign of bad faith or criminality here! Any fraud in the character of the cargo, the route taken on the voyage, any suspicious accident, would give us a sure hold upon all the parties caught on the ship. Either we have been wrong all along, or else they are just blinded fools, and doubly blind to their own interests!"

Vinton's secret knowledge burned silently in his breast! He had never divulged the false nature of the cargo to his friends in Smyrna, and he waited now only in a nervous exaltation for Drage's tiger leap upon the swindlers when the "Cornaro" was once in British customs hands!

"If I've had one, then I've had fifty Smyrniote merchants in the Consulate, to-day, demanding news of the arrival of this argosy of Komanos and Company!" said the puzzled Consul. "And I have had to put up a sign: 'Lloyds' agency is not interested,'" added Van Lennep. "But some startling thing must soon occur!"

The appearance of Sergeant Foley in a state of excitement roused all three of the secret council to activity.

He handed the Consul a neat card.

"Read that! I've a strange thing to report!"

The pasteboard bore these words:

ALFRED MELLONI,
Dragoman.
Smyrna, Turkey. Cairo, Egypt.

"Now," gasped the sergeant, "a fellow in grand Moslem garb just tackled me outside. He demanded to see Mr. Van Lennep, whom I denied as being here.

I was astounded when he clapped me on the shoulder!

"By Jove! It was 'Maloney of Ours,' whom McKillop Pasha years ago, made head drill master for the Khedive's marine guard. He is simply coining money now as a dragoman, for the divil himself, wouldn't take him for an Irishman.

"'You're just my man, Sergeant Foley!' he whispered. 'Tell the Consul that I know that Mr. Van Lennep is in the Consulate! I've been laying out here on the watch. I am head dragoman for "Caspari & Co." in Alexandria and Cairo. They have their branch house also here. Now, I dared not write. I've been closely watched!

"'There's a whole gang of thieves meeting daily in bazaar hours down at Caspari's big carpet warehouse. It's the head men of "Komanos and Company!" Our house works in with these same Smyrna cut-throats!

"'Now, they've had a divil of a miscarriage with the run of the big ship "Cornaro." Somebody has chased her from Athens to the Nore and penned her up there! They swear that it's Van Lennep's work, and this renegade scoundrel Bouclair has offered two hundred pounds to the man who quietly puts Van Lennep out of the way! Warn him, for Heaven's sake, and meet me any night at the "Scottish Arms."

"'Tell the Consul, too, to look out for Lloyds' agent! He is under the shadow of death now!'"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ORDER OF ARREST!—OPIUM TAKES A RISE!—BAFFLED!

There was a suspiciously formal elegance in Captain Enos Drage's "outer man" as he strolled into the office of "Schnorr and Co." at the gloomy hour of half-past four on the evening of the day when Captain

Nicolo and Managing Agent Schnorr had flitted away from the big tramp steamer at daybreak.

London was already overcast with a growing gloom of evening, and the wearied denizens of the dingy brick pile known as "Cadogan Buildings," Bishopsgate, were sullenly closing up for the night. "Shun Lee's" modish frock coat, his proper silk hat, natty red dogskin gloves and cane, lent quite a society glamour to the weather-beaten face which had so recently shone out from under the oilskins and sou'wester on the trawling smack.

A sturdy middle-aged man with an uncomfortable air of being in plain clothes, watched the calm Captain with the air of a trained nurse, a professional pall-bearer, or an expectant slick book-peddler! Bustling Ernest Schnorr gazed at the handsome pink pearl in Drage's four-in-hand tie and wondered at the visitor's unbusinesslike garb. Even Captain Dimitri Nicolo was impressed when the stranger said: "I believe that you are the agent of 'Komanos and Company of Smyrna?' "

"I am! What's your business?" said the suspicious German Jew, with a defiant glare. "I wish to see the captain of the steamer 'Alessandro Cornaro,' now reported at the Nore!" quietly rejoined Drage. "There he is!" uneasily replied Schnorr.

"State your business! Captain Dimitri Nicolo!" the agent added, walking away, and then he closed the door of the inner office. "Schnorr & Co.'s" den was a mass of crowded desks, high stools and book-littered corners, with grimy walls covered with dingy sailing announcements. "I wish to take a look at your manifest," politely said the visitor, who had forgotten to give his name. "I am interested in the cargo!"

Drage's fishy blue eyes were fixed upon the two men, who glowered back in silence. But there was now a ferocious gleam shining out of Dimitri Nicolo's eye, like the glare of a wild beast at bay. "You'll have to wait," huskily said Schnorr.

"The ship has not yet anchored; her voyage is not complete! You shall see no manifest yet!" The man in plain clothes stepped briskly forward. "I represent Her Majesty's customs. Do you refuse to show the manifest of the cargo now, upon proper demand, to an interested party?"

Captain Enos Drage drew out a packet of papers. The keen-eyed Sehnorr caught the glance of a bill of lading. "I most absolutely refuse," answered Sehnorr. "There is no order of court! You have no proper warrant of authority!"

"Do you also refuse?" said Drage, turning to Dimitri Nicolo. The sailor shook his head. "I show nothing! There is the agent!" "Then our business is elsewhere!" calmly replied the old veteran, as he moved to the door, followed by the silent official.

The rattle of a four-wheeler had not died away when Sehnorr hastily dragged Nicolo out from the larger room and locked the door. The clerks had fled, and the glimmering yellow gas blinked in the darkening London streets.

Sehnorr led the Greek out into the street. They were half way across Blackfriars bridge, and their energetic cabby was the "observed of all observers" before the Greek corsair captain caught his breath.

"Where are you going?" he cried. "Listen! I start you, now, down the river on a special engine! You can beat the regular train two hours! Take the first tug at Gravesend and go at once down the river and join the 'Cornaro.' Take command! Do not come up to the limits of the town! Keep your steam always up! Moor her to the first buoy! Make no customs declaration whatever! Mind you! Telegraph to me here for any needful orders. And be sure to keep all strangers off your ship! I'll have an answer from Smyrna by morning!

"We are ruined for life if those sealed hatches are ever opened here!"

"What shall I say?" demanded the startled Greek.

"Say nothing—not a word! You are only waiting

my orders, and you don't know the location of your dock. That's all. I'll come down soon and we'll make a safe rendezvous on shore! Let Mate Corvini, the big engineer and that English head stoker, arm themselves well, and they are to obey your orders and defend the ship!"

Dimitri Nicolo was decidedly rattled. "If any one had a legal order for any of the cargo, like that fellow who showed us one, we must break bulk!" sullenly growled the Greek. "Hold your d—— jaw—and—leave all that to me! There are only four people but our own crowd who have bills of lading. I will get on their trail to-night—every one! They must be mine at any price!"

Before Captain Enos Drage joined the Secret Committee of Lloyds at Higginbotham's mansion, Captain Dimitri Nicolo was a full third of the way to Gravesend, and his "special" was speeding along like the wind.

Chairman John listened to the rasping voice of Drage in silence, while the fellow committeemen turned the subject carefully over.

Ernest Schnorr was already darting about London, his blue eyes gleaming in the criminal's furtive keenness, while Walden and Waddingham advised their chairman to see his solicitors at once and take the most energetic proceedings.

"That's just what I propose to do," Higginbotham replied. "But, first, our rat must get well within the trap! When the Captain makes his custom house declaration we have full legal power over the vessel and all its cargo, but not till then! I have borrowed this bill of lading for thirty-four cases of opium, just so as to give Captain Drage the right to demand to see the manifest."

"Whose is it?" said Shun Lee, with some interest. "You should hold on to it! Buy it at once, so as to have all your legal rights to see the inside of that cargo hold!"

"I got it as a favor through one of my brokers," said

Higginbotham. "It's endorsed to bearer. I don't know the owner, but, I'll have my broker buy it in to-morrow.

"You had better run down, Enos, to Gravesend by the first train; watch the anchoring of the ship; note the customs declaration, and then find out from the river pilot, what dock they will discharge at!

"Put your own secret service men on to carefully watch the 'Cornaro' night and day! By to-morrow night,I'll have my solicitor's opinion and also the bill of lading bought in and duly transferred on this fellow Schnorr's delivery books.

"I've heard of him before as a devilish slippery customer! We have them now nailed to the cross—what the Yankees call 'a dead thing!'"

"I've seen a dead thing rise up and crawl away on many a Chinese field of action! These fellows will die hard!" muttered Drage.

"I'll be off at five, and so I leave you men to your 'night-cap.'" "Good night, Mr. Chief Inspector!" was the chorus which followed the old veteran to his lair.

But all night, Enos Drage tossed around in uneasy dreams. He was chasing the huge lead-colored tramp steamer along the coast of China, and pouring into the fugitive the shells of his ringing howitzers from the swift "Shun Lee."

But the flag with the black circle and K flew defiantly still as the last volleys died away, and the face of scowling Dimitri Nicolo was pressed close to his own as the wily Greek whispered: "A stern chase is a long one!"

When the invigorated old veteran drove away in the murky morning to catch the Gravesend train, the huge "Alessandro Cornaro" was easily swinging, moored at a great red can buoy, two miles below Gravesend, with Captain Dimitri Nicolo in close conference with his three subordinates.

"Answer no pilot signal!" he said. "Let no one but a uniformed customs officer come on board—no mat-

ter what they say. I'll take a little sleep. Rouse me, Corvini, if there's any news. Remember to say that we are 'waiting orders.'"

After a long night spent in chasing all over the vast area of London, Agent Ernest Schnorr was stealing a few hours' rest. "Wake me, so that I can be on 'Change by eleven," he said, drowsily, to his secret partner, who was sitting on watch at his side.

"I've already got the three small holders under my control! Isaac Meyer, the other holder, has gone to Amsterdam," he grinned, "for four days. Now, if I can handle him and Sassoon and Company, there will never be a hatch lifted!"

Captain Enos Drage was a grumbling and discontented man as he sullenly nodded over his "Times" on the way down to Gravesend. He wrathfully recalled the defiant manner of both Schnorr and Nicolo.

The secret reports as to Ernest Schnorr which the Committee had obtained were not at all reassuring.

An industrious, secretive and reticent German Jew, with a large Mediterranean connection, and the command of some capital, Schnorr was a type of the sleek continental strangers refuging in London and undercutting the "British merchant." Master of all the continental tongues and several Levantine languages, Ernest Schnorr was voted on 'Change to be a "slick 'un."

Under his shaggy eyebrows his keen eyes devoured the contents of the paper held close to his nose, while the play of his crafty mind was masked by his immutable visage. "He is not going to die without a hard struggle," mused "Shun Lee." "This fellow is cool and smart—and he will die game!"

As the train ran on by Deptford, Greenwich, Woolwich and distant Tilbury came in view, Enos Drage was still undecided in his mind as he reached Gravesend. He rubbed his faded eyes as he gazed from the first rising ground above the Nore upon the broadening river which is the life of London. The great lead-colored tramp was not visible when he hurried down

to Gravesend pier and swept the bosom of the stream with his glass.

In the eight hundred yards' width of the broadening estuary he saw no four-masted leviathan with the circle K flag at her masthead!

"By Jove! It's quick work! Have they gone up to London, or have they already cut stick?" He hurried down to the customs office. "If I only had bills of lading for any considerable part of the cargo, I would ask the department to telegraph to the forts at Tilbury and Shoeburyness not to let her pass! Ah! We must work on Sassoon; he has advanced great sums on a third of the cargo; and even my little measly bill of lading for thirty-four cases of the opium is not our own property yet!"

Drage felt in his heart that John Higginbotham was being neatly outwitted! In ten minutes, he was closeted with the chief officer guarding the old "Hythe," where, from the time of Domesday Book—galley and argosy, fleet and Indiaman, always had halted, before going up to London.

"Sorry that I cannot officially aid you, Captain Drage," said the official, now familiar with Drage's extraordinary powers. "You see, you have no proof to detain her! They are a very queer lot on board of that big tramp!

"We guard the line of London's jurisdiction, and here the voyage ends, and pilots and customs officers take charge. But this freighter did not run up into the port. It's certainly very mysterious. The captain, Nicolo, a Greek—a very cute-looking chap—came down here on a special engine from London this morning.

"He ran his ship just up over the line to end the voyage so as to free his insurance, by order of the agent, and has now dropped down and anchored in the Pool, six miles below here.

"He has stoutly refused to make his declarations, and says that it will be four or five days before his pier is ready at London docks, as the 'Alessandro Cornaro'

is one of the largest merchant ships entering the Thames. I have double sealed all his hatches over the Smyrna port seals, and I have a boat watching him below, with orders to report any strange happening.

"That's all I dare do now. I have not the right to keep an officer on the boat, as he is only moored to a buoy, with banked fires, and is awaiting orders."

"It is very strange," said the nonplussed Drage. "Did you see the ship's clearance?"

"Yes," said the official, scratching his head. "All in order. But this Nicolo is a regular sea lawyer. He won't declare! He won't show his manifest, and he refers me to Schnorr and Co., Cadogan Buildings, Bishopsgate."

"What can I do?" cried the enraged Drage.

"The voyage is surely ended," said the official. "I would go down and demand to see the manifest, and so claim a delivery forthwith, of your own goods, in kind. If he don't come to time, apply at once for an embargo, and get out an order of arrest! And then your solicitor must libel the ship for damages, as well as proceed to sue the agent.

"To tell you the truth, I've had fifty inquiries about that ship and her cargo already! What can I say in answer? Nothing!

"Only this I do say: If you are a bona fide owner of even five cases of her cargo, you have your legal rights. Lord! There's been a hundred fruit brokers and opium dealers from London down here! The market is on the jump, and the cargo is the heaviest ever cleared from Smyrna!

"Some one will make or break on this deal. Take my own launch and run down at once to the Pool! I'll send an officer along as a witness!"

Enos Drage started when the officer said: "By the way, this fellow has been telegraphing like mad to Smyrna—the town operator told me so—and he has got several cipher answers, too.

"You'll have to look very sharp to catch him nap-

ping! If he didn't look like a true Greek with those gold earrings, I'd swear that he was a disguised Yankee! He is as slick a chap as ever sailed up the river!"

Drage gazed at his trusty old Frodsham. "If Higginbotham only gets the control of the Sassoon stuff, or buys this one bill of lading, then we're in a strong position as bona fide owners. Till then, the Greek is ahead! I'll stir John up!"

In five minutes the little launch was throbbing down along the smooth waters, aided by the refluent tide. "Only twenty-four miles from the Exchange—and yet I dare not openly telegraph or telephone to John!

"If he plays his part well, we can have the order of arrest to-morrow. But, Johnny Greek may cut stick!"

The sleepy old river town with its beautiful market gardens lay spread along the river, fringed with its forests of masts, the argosies of a world's commerce.

There, in the silent reaches where Cabot and Frobisher once moored their world-finding caravels, the anxious old veteran at length descried the great freighter. A thin blue smoke was pouring out from her funnels and she was heavily moored with a shackle to a huge buoy, a handy holding-on place for disabled ships.

When the little launch swept alongside the "Alessandro Cornaro" the forbidding face of Tomaso Corvini peeped out over the rail. An Italian nimbly ran down the gangway with a boathook in his hand, and roughly pushed the launch off.

Then, at short range, Corvini and Drage exchanged the "compliments of the season"!

In vain did Enos Drage storm and wave his bill of lading. "Capitano gone to London!" shrieked the Italian. "No man on a ship! Keep a' off! Keep a' off!" and, an ugly-looking revolver was gleaming in his hand as he spoke.

A shrill boatswain's whistle was soon heard sounding, and a crowd of baboon-faced Lascars and Malays quickly hoisted up the Jacob's ladder, so that the an-

gered Enos Drage was powerless to climb the perpendicular sides.

"Better sheer off, sir," earnestly said the official witness. "Get the law on 'em, and we'll come down again and board her sure enough!"

With a heavy heart, Shun Lee Drage saw the "Cornaro" disappear behind him, her flag flying in triumphant derision as he raced away up the river on his return to Gravesend.

On the way back to London he nursed his wrath, but a distinct trail of sulphurous oaths was left behind the defeated emissary of Lloyds! "By Jove! That fraudulent cargo is in there, and it will yet come out! I swear it shall!"

He had telegraphed to John Higginbotham to meet him at the West end mansion as soon as possible.

Old Enos chafed alone in the library until at the hour of six, when three anxious-looking men joined him, but only to increase his troubles. There was no thought of turtle and turbot—and, for once in his life, John Higginbotham allowed the grave-faced butler to call in vain. "The Governor's rarely put out when he won't eat his dinner!" was the news which flew down to the servants' hall.

"Tell me all your day's adventures, Enos," sadly said Higginbotham.

"The deuce is to pay on 'Change about this ship, and the whole opium market has taken a frantic upward jump! The fruit brokers, too, are mobbing each other, and so, we are either off our reckoning or else we have the very fiend himself to fight!" Walden and Waddingham sadly sniffed the distant dinner, while old "Shun Lee" Drage concisely related his futile attempts to board the "Cornaro."

"The crazy pirate had 'shoot' in his eyes, and so I dared not proceed to extremities! So here I am!

"What's your luck?" "Poor enough!" gruffly said Chairman John. "I'm going to see Sassoon, however, to-night, at his own house!"

"Did you see these advertisements?" said Walden.

"They are in all the evening papers," and he slowly read:

"Steamer 'Alessandro Cornaro'—Smyrna!!!"
"All holders of bills of lading by the above-named steamer, now lying at Gravesend, will hear of matters of immediate advantage and profit by instantly addressing X. Y Z., Times Office."

"Now, what in heaven's name does all this new hubbub mean?" cried Waddingham. "The steamer is surely bewitched—a regular Pandora's box! I sent my private broker around to Schnorr & Co.'s office, as you requested, and there is a notice posted in three or four languages:

"'Steamer "Alessandro Cornaro," lying in lower Thames. Customs declarations are not yet made. No business transacted for four days regarding her cargo. Waiting orders.'"

The irate Waddingham proceeded: "When my broker insisted on seeing old Schnorr himself, the greasy Hebrew just pointed to the sign with a grin. 'Can't you read?' he said, and then he strolled out and locked his office.

"Now, what does all this covert mystery denote? There was a regular mob of middle-men worrying away at Schnorr about other deliveries. They have nothing to show for it, but the market is running up so they are all crazy for news!

"For there's nothing now on the way from Smyrna, and this vast opium speculation is going on to a regular fever!"

Enos Drage's ferret eyes were fixed upon the crestfallen Higginbotham. "Did you not purchase the certificate for the thirty-four cases, so as to be safe as a bona fide holder?" Old John Higginbotham greatly hated to confess his defeat.

"I tried to, but the owner, 'Isaac Meyer,' a Levan-

tine goods broker, has gone over to Amsterdam for four days. He has sent his partner up to my broker with a written demand for the bill of lading, which, of course, I have agreed to return in the morning.

"I offered a handsome bonus to the fellow myself, but he only wriggled around and said that his principal had demanded the bill of lading, and might before now have given some one else a delivery order based on it on a sale memorandum.

"I tried to get a fifty pound note into his hand, and then take a memorandum of the sale, but the agent was too sly. So, Enos, you had better give me back that bill of lading. If they call it in, I cannot force them to sell"

"Did you make him a smart offer?" said Drage, his courage sinking. "I thought that I went far enough.

"I offered two hundred and fifty pounds bonus, and the highest price opium would touch in the month for the delivery order and a transfer for full value of the bill of lading!" The Chairman was dejected, as Drage said: "Then that settles it!

"When a London Jew will let two hundred and fifty pounds go by—there's something bigger in sight!"

"Buy it in at all hazards!" cried both Walden and Waddingham in excited chorus. "If I can—but I'm afraid that they are all alarmed and will act on the defensive now. They are fighting shy!" was Higginbotham's verdict.

"What did your solicitors say?" ruefully demanded Drage. "Why," uneasily replied the Chairman, "they agreed that the taking of advances upon a false cargo, the insurance of a false cargo, the uttering on false manifests and bogus bills of lading are all in themselves serious crimes, justifying an immediate embargo —and even an order of arrest.

"But, so far, we have not a single bit of proof save this romantic story of your young American friend at Smyrna. We must prove it. I am to see the solicitors at eleven to-morrow. You had better meet me there, Enos, for if I live till noon to-morrow I will buy

Sassoon's whole cargo interest out and out, get an embargo, open that ship's hatches, and then, by heavens, find what's in her!"

The great London merchant was at last on his mettle.

"I'll spend my own good yellow guineas to show up this daring fraud! That I will!" "I can't see where you can force a hold on these scoundrels," said Walden. "Whoever 'Komanos and Company' are, they are past-masters in the arts of knavery!

"Now, observe! The insurance policies are all void now! Drage reports that the big ship ran a few hundred yards into the jurisdiction of the lower river, known as 'London Port.'

"The customs officers say that her clearance papers are all duly regular. As to the insurance of a false cargo, Lloyds is now free—the risks are all vitiated—and you have earned a handsome marine premium.

"For the effecting of the false insurance, the Smyrna people are out of jeopardy! It was all done here. The agents here are either innocent, or else stand as innocent.

"There is no claim whatever to contest. We can punish no one here if the Smyrna laws have been violated. We can't even hold them for uttering false manifests.

"The captain has not yet made his declaration, and I am afraid that we can't force him to! He may lie for six months at the Pool, repairing machinery or 'waiting orders,' as he says. He is just over the line!

"If he does not place the alleged false manifests in customs hands, we have no proof. Schnorr will not commit himself!

"To prove that the voyage has been a criminal one, that the bills of lading are fraudulent, we must become the owners for value of some of these bills of lading, and then, if we can force them to open hatches, the delivery of our cargo; the goods proving fraudulent and valueless, will surely hold the ship and all its officers, and we can then make reclamations on Smyrna!

"Here's this advertisement now—someone is already on the qui vive; we may not even be able to get hold of any cargo. If your American friend could only have got some cargo of his own on the ship!"

"Ah!" growled Drage, "that wretch Bouclair would not let a single stranger set foot on the ship in Smyrna, and as he himself gave all the shipping orders, no outsider could get a chest of cargo on her!

"There's only four little outside lots straggling, and Sassoon is our only chance. A last chance!" "You are right," groaned Higginbotham.

"We are absolutely without proof, unless we get an order of arrest or embargo, they can quietly laugh at us! We can only chase them down and put them to great expense, but then we are spending pound for pound with them, and, once out of English jurisdiction, all our work is Love's Labor Lost!"

"You are right," was old Shun Lee's dictum. "They might run into some foreign port and dump that whole stuff into the bonded warehouses."

"I fail to see where that would help them," said the Chairman. "Ah! Yes," cheerfully chimed in Waddingham, "there's a regular Mediterranean gang of rascals who are closely leagued together. I'll warrant that all this stuff is properly put up to look well. They will warehouse the stuff! Get regular receipts, and then, through innocent hands, get large advances up to seventy-five per cent of market value, let the stuff lie, and divide the money and cut stick!

"This 'imitation cargo' is also used by Polish Jews and fraudulent bankrupt dealers, who sometimes cover the imposing stuff with a heavy fire insurance, and then it strangely disappears in well-managed flames!"

"Which proves that there is more than one way to skin a cat!" remarked the old Chairman. "Let us have our dinner, and I'll go over to Sassoon's. He is our very last hope! If he controls the cargo on which their house has advanced its cash, I'll warrant you that I'll have out an order of arrest by to-morrow night!"

There was little said at the substantial feast of the

great merchant, but Captain Enos Drage saw "through a glass, dimly," the chief inspectorship very much farther off than when the "Alessandro Cornaro" first crept out of the Channel mists into the welcome shelter of the deep, tranquil pool of the Downs—far inside the wreck-dotted reefs of the Goodwin Sands!

"It seems as if the wolf had turned, and the hunter himself was in the trap!" he bitterly mused. "I shall be up late with Sassoon," the host said, as they separated. "I've made up my mind to have our detectives watch the steamer!

"Remember, Enos, we meet at the solicitor's at eleven!" And the camp-fires of Lloyds' secret army were not glittering as gaily on this night as the twinklights of the well fortified camp of Komanos and Company.

Mr. Ernest Schnorr sat late into the night counseling with his secretly banded confederates. Captain Dimitri Nicolo received his final orders for guidance. "Don't you stir a single turn of the screw without orders from me!

"Let no one on board! You will have my definite orders by telegraph or messenger! Be ready to sail at a moment's notice, if our people should get into any trouble here."

"Sail! Where to?" stammered the Greek.

"Anywhere—out of English waters," growled Schnorr. "We never were so hard put before. And, if we are balked on this proceeding, that sniveling cur Van Lennep shall die—I swear it! That's all. And everyone who has helped his dirty spy work in Smyrna! This trick has been done from there!"

The red-bearded German Jew sat long alone after his subordinates had departed.

Chart and map lay spread out before him, his simple schope of beer and his pipe comforted him, as he studied for an hour; and then he opened a little safe in his gloomy, squalid chambers, and took out a private check book.

"It's hard!" he groaned. "Isaac Meyer is a He-

brew, and a hard, hard man! But the job must be done! If I pick up the other two bills of lading—then, if I can handle Sassoon from the other end, the ship can safely make the run! It only ties up ten thousand pounds! But, if Bouclair loads that on the insurance all right, we are safe, and the golden harvest will be reaped! There's no other course! It's Hobson's choice now!"

It was an hour after his usual time when the careful Ernest Schnorr entered Cadogan Buildings and ran over his mail. A glance here and there enabled him to set his two shock-headed clerks at work.

"I'll be back in three or four hours! If any telegrams come, Windmuller, bring them over to Einstein's Coffee House. You will find me over there." The clerk nodded and only pushed his pen faster.

In ten minutes, Ernest Schnorr was closeted in an obscure restaurant inner room with three or four Semitic individuals of a greasy magnificence. "Well, Morris! Jacob!" he cheerily cried. "What news?" "We have found the men vot holds the two outside bills of ladings," sputtered Morris, as a motherly-looking Buda Pest Jewess served the beer and brought out the cigars.

It was a house famed for "Kosher" cooking, and sharp bargains, smuggled diamonds, stray jewels, shady notes and stolen bonds often changed hands here under the eyes of the portly Rebecca, who was both sly and "Kosher," as regarded her own underhand trade.

No minion of the law or Christian spy could ever manage to pounce down upon those whom Rebecca had taken to her full-bosomed heart!

Schnorr produced an abstract of the manifest. "They have answered the advertisements?" "Yes! One has a hundred and fifty boxes of raisins. The other only ten boxes of opium!

"Good goods!" "Real goods, too!" snickered Morris.

"Did you get the marks and names?" anxiously said

Schnorr. "All right! We were very careful," was the eager answer.

"And—what do they want?" said Schnorr. "Oh! About double price only!" said Morris, figuring up a few stray calculations on a greasy Hebrew journal.

"Go off and bring them at once to the office. Give Windmuller their cards. Be sure that you turn in the bills of lading to him, and hurry up. Come back here at two o'clock for luncheon with me. Be sure to buy —at any price!"

"Now for Isaac Meyer!" mused Schnorr, as he paid the bill and exchanged a few low spoken words with the admiring Rebecca, who stood there near him with a pulpy-faced, overgrown child in her arms, plucking with true Hebraic eagerness at her gleaming diamond bosom pin.

Turning down into a maze of dingy side alleys, Ernest Schnorr then entered a little twelve by nine corner office, where a battered sign, "Goldstein and Co., Merchandise Brokers," drearily met the eye.

There was a single dingy inner room, and Schnorr threw open the door.

"Where's your partner?" he roughly said to a middle-aged foreigner, who never ceased his writing or raised his head.

"Been here and gone—back at twelve!" was the response. "He's gone over to the Exchange. They tell me that opium is running up to balloon prices!"

Schnorr's face flushed in anger as he turned. "Have him wait for me, surely, here at twelve. I'll be back! The low dog! Is he conspiring too, now?" muttered the shipping agent, who quickly called a hansom and drove back to the haunt of Rebecca.

A cry of joy escaped his lips as he read a telegram silently handed him by the velvet-eyed Rebecca.

"So," he mused, "if I get Isaac Meyers' bill of lading, then, in four days we will have gotten every single bit of the cargo under our own hand!"

He checked off every single name from his consignee list of the "Cornaro's" freight. "Caspari at

Athens. Back in four days. Will settle Sassoon's agent here. They will cable to London and withdraw. He telegraphs his acceptance. We will cable when advances are paid. Then hold freight and notify Sassoon. Your plan is approved."

The signature, "Komanos and Company, Emile Bouclair, Secretary," was the attestation of the good news. The overjoyed Ernest Schnorr's cup of gladness ran over when his puffing agents dashed in, Morris in the lead.

"All is finished, and Windmuller has both the bills of lading in the safe!" There was the unwonted ardor of a bottle of the happy Rebecca's best Tokayer, and Ernest Schnorr departed to the conquest of Isaac Meyer.

"Blast them all! I can defy them now!" said Schnorr, as he rattled along back to Goldstein's.

"But, Van Lennep must be fixed before we work the plan out. I'll write to Bouclair to-night to the old address at Scio! They can easily send it over by a man!"

For, Mr. Ernest Schnorr now contemplated "a deed without a name!" But he rallied his wits as he saw a thin, white-faced young fellow of thirty, with overhanging temples, greasy, dark clustering curls, a red, sensual mouth, and staring black eyes, furtively gazing at him out of Goldstein and Co.'s one window.

"Come in! We are alone!" said Meyer in a slippery, easy voice. "I had been out on business. Now, how do we stand this morning?"

Schnorr came to the point at once. "Meyer, I called to take up that opium bill of lading of yours, if you care to sell it. We've got a large cargo, and it may be weeks before we will get a dock. The 'Cornaro' is the largest vessel in the Thames to-day!"

"Vell, my fren'," lisped Meyer, an eager fire lighting up his crafty eyes, "what's your terms?" Ernest Schnorr felt the pressure of his private check book in his pocket. He tried to look unconcerned as he said, quietly: "Highest market rates—and—a good bonus!"

"Vot bonus?" placidly murmured Meyer, his Sem-

itic accent returning in the delicious excitement of the welcome chaffering.

"A hundred pounds!" impressively said Schnorr, now gazing steadily at the young broker. Meyer laughed an oily derisive laugh. "Opium is kiting now! Why, I can take market rates and get three times your bonus! I wouldn't hear of it!"

"What's your price?" demanded Schnorr, in a surly tone—"bonus and all?" The slender young fellow figured in silence for a moment and never raised his head, as he quietly said: "Five thousand pounds for the bill of lading, and cash down!"

Schnorr sprang to his feet in a purple rage. "You're a mean robber!" he cried, shaking his fist as he spoke.

And then, a greasy smile stole over Isaac Meyer's colorless face.

"So are you, Schnorr, and you know it! One touch of your hand and I'll call the police! Now, I'll make you discharge your ship! Get out of here! If you want that bill of lading you'll have to pay my price. I can hold it to speculate on it, and easily make the money. But I give you notice that I demand my cargo as it is!"

Then, with a quiet sneer, he quickly passed out of the door, leaving the burly agent white with rage.

Before the crestfallen Schnorr was fairly seated at his luncheon, Mr. Isaac Meyer drove directly to the office of Jared Arrowsmith, the head broker of the mighty Higginbotham.

"See here!" he cried, as the Englishman sprang to meet him; "I'll not sell you my bill of lading, but I'll make you this offer: I'll take five hundred pounds bonus, and go on board at Gravesend with your agent, tender the freight in gold and demand the delivery. If they make it, the opium shall be yours if you pay me my price! If they refuse to break bulk and deliver, I get the five hundred pounds bonus for my trouble, and I am then free to sue them, or else sell my bill of lading as I choose!"

"Done!" said Arrowsmith. "Come down here to-morrow morning at nine, and I'll send a good man down with you!"

And gayly did Isaac Meyer return to his dingy lair. "Somebody wants this thing pretty badly now!" the mystified young cormorant murmured. "I'm sure of this five hundred pounds extra. If I sell to Arrowsmith, he, too, must pay my price! If Schnorr wants it, he shall sweat, the brute!"

There was a lumpy boy waiting with a note at Goldstein's, a communication which expressed Schnorr's idea of the Mosaic law of half and half!

Meyer simply grinned as he tore the note up and threw the tatters away. "Tell him there's no answer! Tell him that I'm no fool, and all I want is for him to let me alone!"

And hence, when the returning son of Rebecca gave Mr. Ernest Schnorr the impudent message he cursed vainly in a good-fashioned piratical style.

For the first time he felt sure that a snaky cordon of fire was closing down on "Komanos and Company."

"I've made an enemy—foolishly, too!" he growled. "What will this dirty rogue not try to do?" And in the dim watches of the long night Mr. Schnorr had not succeeded in studying the problem out.

When he timidly ventured to send a note to Goldstein the next day that he would "take the property," a verbal message told him that "Mr. Meyer had left town!"

He vaguely wondered where the Israelitish speculator had gone, but he did not wait without information for many hours.

In the hours while Schnorr and Meyer battled, Mr. John Higginbotham had been wrestling with his grave solicitors, and Captain Enos Drage chafed like a hound in the leash, while the principals solemnly debated the baffling attitude of Messrs. Sassoon and Company

"We are truly interested in nearly a third of the cargo of the 'Cornaro,'" had said the great head of the house. "Our Smyrna agent advanced certain sums to

Caspari and Company. We claim only our advances, interest, and the usual profits of a consignment. We have no grounds whereon to base any charges of fraud, but if you decide, as representing Lloyds, to take the risk and pay the expenses, we will allow you to use our firm name to take out an order of arrest or embargo, but only subject to all the merchant rights of Caspari and Co. in Smyrna as our original shippers!"

"Now, do you see, Captain," remarked Higginbotham, "they will take out the order, but it shows our hand to the enemy, and, moreover, it is a serious matter!"

Whereat the solicitors decided "to turn it all over till the morning," and then to lay out a course of action. For, the acute Schnorr had already reported the machinery as out of order, and also, that no dock was available. "We will have to examine into the case, set up these facts, and proceed with due caution," said the solicitors.

"Yes! They always do 'proceed with due caution,' but even a half loaf is better than no bread!" mused Drage.

But his anxious spirit swelled within him as he learned at dinner of the appointment made with Isaac Meyer! He yearned once more to walk the deck of the "Alessandro Cornaro" as a conqueror, and while Schnorr and Drage slept restlessly thinking of the veiled conflict, Isaac Meyer slumbered like a child and dreamed of the double event. For he would come down like a wolf on the fold now!

Captain Enos Drage was in a very sour humor as he promptly reported at Blackfriars bridge early the next day to meet Jared Arrowsmith, the private broker of the mighty Chairman. His morning mail from Southsea had brought to him a letter from Miss Lavinia which filled him with a new and serious alarm.

"The Child" was manifesting symptoms of an oversolicitude as to the fate of the lonely young American at Smyrna, indicative of an acute cardiac disturbance.

"Lily's feelings are to me a mystery, and a great

sorrow! I cannot understand her! You must reassure her, for now she is pining needlessly. My comfort seems to be naught to her!" "Poor Lavinia!" mused Drage. "It's a side of life that you do not understand, true enough! I must recall Vinton out of the dangers which threaten forever any one known to be connected with us. But, there's the Herald business to mask his purpose!"

The old captain secretly feared for Van Lennep also now, as the letter which brought on the warning of the transformed "Maloney of Ours," was an ominous sign.

"Of course they will try to strike back!" The captain had followed the New York Herald, wherein a series of brilliant articles upon the Levant proved that Howard Vinton was calmly following out his dual role.

"If I could only get there," the old captain sighed. There was a brief introduction by Arrowsmith at the Blackfriars station. Broker Arrowsmith handed Drage a bag of gold.

"Here is ten pounds more than the legal freight and all the possible charges on Mr. Isaac Meyer's consignment of opium. You are to make a formal demand for the delivery of the thirty-four cases in kind, on our behalf. Mr. Meyer, who is speculating on this consignment, is to settle with me if we can get a quick delivery, and he goes down only as a silent witness!

"We have agreed to take this merchandise off his hands if delivery can be effected, but our own option expires to-night if we cannot get at the goods. In case of a refusal, you can then return the bills of lading to Mr. Meyer and bring us back our money. If the bills of lading are purchased by us later, we wish to sue for all our rights if denied, otherwise he can sue himself or settle!"

It was a grimly silent voyage to Gravesend. Captain Drage instinctively distrusted his young Hebraic companion, who pored over a German paper and sucked away at an old student pipe.

The keen young Israelite had duly sized up Enos as

a secret officer of the law. But, his fishy blue eyes showed no feeling. "I am all right either way. There's a craze on the market. If one does not buy at my price, another will!" He had easily fathomed the weakness of the blustering Schnorr.

As Enos Drage neared Gravesend, he revolved a thousand plans of communicating with the cooped-up Jack Masterson.

"No! It won't do!" he sighed. "One sign would be enough to cause distrust, and poor old Jack would be sandbagged and tossed overboard, or else chased off the ship! If they mean to cut and run, he is my only mainstay!" The twenty-five thousand pounds once so temptingly near, and the promised Inspectorship, seemed to be now as far off as the Himalayas.

The customs chief found time to whisper as the launch was made ready: "Several people have tried to board the boat to-day, and all have been driven off! I'll send down an officer with you! The captain is on board. He reports his machinery as out of order, and no dock assignment yet. The last is a lie—for the dock authorities secretly telegraph me the agent has not even applied for a berthing!

"We are all watching her here night and day, under secret orders. I'll have my man hail her, and be sure to get you an interview.

"Look out for this young fellow with you! He's a shady party and the well-known agent of a band of German Jew smugglers! I know him!"

There was no hostile band gathered as the customs launch neared the huge "Alessandro Cornaro," still lazily dragging away at the double shackles to the buoy. A stern anchor kept her from swinging across the stream.

Captain Dimitri Nicolo, gold-banded cap in hand, met the party at once on the quarter deck, and politely conducted them to the cabin. As the party entered, Enos Drage caught sight of Mr. Jack Masterson contentedly fishing over the rail, and with an exercise

of nerve the imprisoned chief stoker never lifted his head.

"My chief engineer, Mr. McGregor," said the wary Greek captain. "He always translates for me!" The three visitors bowed to Sandy, who whispered to a cabin boy, and the usual courtesies of nautical hospitality were tendered.

"And now, gentlemen, what is your business?" sharply demanded Nicolo, when all hands had spliced the main brace, save Enos, who accepted his usual cigar.

"You are the captain, now in charge of the 'Alessandro Cornaro?'" briskly said Drage. The Greek bowed.

"Then, sir, I demand the delivery of the merchandise which is covered by this bill of lading. Here in gold is the legal freight and charges!" said Drage. "Please to count it, and to observe that I have added ten pounds for the expense of opening the hatches. The consignee, Mr. Isaac Meyer, is also here, ready to sign for you a receipt for the goods!"

At a curt nod from McGregor, the captain counted the money, examined the bills of lading, and then replaced the golden coins.

"I have not yet made my declaration," he said. "My machinery is all out of order. My ship is unable to proceed! I have no dock berth yet assigned, and so I refuse to open the hatches without the positive order of Ernest Schnorr, the local agent of the owners!"

When Nicolo had finished these words, he rose politely, but decidedly, and bowed, cap in hand.

"Who are the owners of the vessel?" demanded Drage. "You must see Mr. Schnorr!" dryly answered Nicolo. "We jointly demand to see this freight, and we make our demand now for instant delivery!"

"See Mr. Schnorr!" again remarked Nicolo.

"Will you put your refusal to deliver the goods in writing?" cried the incensed old veteran. "I have now to request you to leave the ship! I decline any further answers," said Nicolo. "You can proceed by law

as you wish. I am 'waiting orders,' and I am free of all customs control!"

"He speaks the truth," whispered the sorrowful customs inspector. The discomfited party slowly arose and filed down into the launch.

Before it had gained headway, it drifted down under the spot where Jack Masterson was fishing. The quick-witted old man o' war's man perfectly understood Enos Drage's furtive signal "to stick to the ship!" But he dared not to utter a single word!

His own life was, even now, at the mercy of "Komanos and Company," standing sternly at bay.

"I do not see what I can do," lisped Isaac Meyer. "I will now take back my bills of lading and see my solicitors. This ship may lie here for a month yet, and I may lose a trade. My time is money!"

The disgusted captain handed over the papers without a word. "I wish both of you gentlemen to make careful notes of the interview," he said. "The courts alone can now help us!"

Enos Drage was fain to linger an hour in consultation with the superior officers of Customs who were now gathered at Gravesend, while his strange speculative friend Mr. Isaac Meyer, sped away to the London train.

"These fellows seem to know what they are up to!" said the Chief of Customs, to the enraged old veteran.

"This chap Nicolo has been getting to-day a shower of telegrams through Reuter's Agency and the Agence Havas of Paris, for the last two days. We have had all the duplicates sent up to London for deciphering, as Agent Schnorr has absolutely refused to disclose the owners of the ship. He simply says that 'Bouclair of Smyrna' loaded her for 'Komanos and Company,'—for whom he is the local agent. It's a very grave responsibility to embargo that ship,—it entails great expense—and a vast trouble as to legal complications."

"Blow the expense!" remarked Drage. "By Heavens! I swear that I will be down here to-morrow, with an order of arrest!"

All the way home to London, Captain Drage grumbled, but his quondam partner of the morning was in high glee.

When Isaac Meyer descended at Blackfriars Station, —the "partner" who used "temporarily" the convenient name of Goldstein, grabbed him in his arms, with an anxious perspiration beading his Hebraic forehead. There was "business" in every thrill of his husky voice.

"Schnorr is a vaitin'—a vaitin'," he gasped. "Be careful! Take a fly and, ged down, und schtop at der corner, und valk in—just, easily like! Don'd mage no mistake!" The blue eyes of Meyer glittered hawklike. "Then, we've got him! I must hurry, and get my money. For, that ship will be in trouble, to-morrow!"

Mr. Ernest Schnorr had shifted the burden of responsibility, and he longed to close the matter, for Bouclair had wired him: "Buy the Meyer consignment at any price! We close all with Caspari to-morrow!"

The humiliated ship agent never even lifted his head as Isaac Meyer strolled back into his office.

"Hello,—you here!" the young speculator roughly said. "Come for another quarrel? What is it? I'm now going home!"

Then, Ernest Schnorr produced a bundle carefully from his breast pocket after closing the door. "I'll just take those papers! Just indorse those bills of lading to 'Komanos and Company!'"

Isaac Meyer counted out the bundle of Bank of England notes.

"You're five hundred pounds short here!" he rasped out. "I charge that for a day's lost time and for your snarling impudence of yesterday!"

"I have not the money with me!" groaned Schnorr.

"Oh! Your check will do. You've always got some money in bank—Mr. Schnorr!" pleasantly said Isaac Meyer, as he filled out a regular mercantile invoice.

He pocketed the notes and check and then tossed the papers on the desk, when they were signed!

"I'm going to shut up!" he roughly said.

And, when alone, he was just as happy as Captain Drage, to whom Higginbotham had just delivered the order of arrest of the "Cornaro," on behalf of Sassoon and Co.!

CHAPTER IX.

KOMANOS AND COMPANY STRIKE BACK!—THE CAPTAIN OF THE "APOLLO" FINDS A HIDING PLACE!

Several crafty minds were busied with the vexing problem of the "Alessandro Cornaro" in the dingy purlieus of the city beyond Temple Bar, when the triumphant Captain Enos Drage sped swiftly down the Thames on a Customs launch crowded with officers.

Messrs. Walden and Waddingham were anxiously awaiting at Sassoon's office for the telegraphic report of the seizure of the ship. The night had brought a new gleam of comfort to Ernest Schnorr. "These meddling fellows,—whoever they may be, are powerless now!" he mused, "for, I now control all the whole cargo save the Sassoon hypothecations. And what do the Sassoons care, as long as they get interest, advances and a round profit. The very moment that I hear from Smyrna that the cargo is safely reinsured,—then, good-bye to these persecutors. It is the work of some of the dirty insurance spies. Once past the Nore, we can laugh at them all!"

John Higginbotham, in his head office at Lloyds Rooms, was closeted with his broker, Arrowsmith, as 'change opened.

"You tell me that this Meyer is only holding his opium on speculation. Watch him now very closely! This market is just going crazy, for the delay in the 'Cornaro's' unloading seems to have loosened every speculator in London, and driven them into the field as a howling mob to get all that opium cargo. Report in here every hour, for,—I expect very important telegrams from Gravesend!"

Mr. Ernest Schnorr, on his part, was anxiously awaiting a cablegram from Smyrna to announce the retirement of all Sassoon's advances, and, so, to seal up the last porthole of his hidden enemies.

He grasped his hat and ran out into the street when a messenger lad breathlessly dashed in and whispered a few words.

"To the lawyers! No! First,—to the telegraph,—to warn Captain Nicolo!" Out of a clear sky the lightning had struck! "'Crown' officers are on the way to seize the ship 'Alessandro Cornaro.' Order was issued on showing of 'Sassoon and Company!'" These words from his lawyer now aroused Schnorr to a tiger-like activity.

"I have it!" he muttered as he dashed into the nearest telegraph office and sent an alarm message with his directions to the landlord of the "Kentish Arms,"—at which snug hostelry in Gravesend, Dimitri Nicolo had a man waiting night and day, for all sudden emergencies.

"That will bother these fellows till I can see my lawyer. Ah! If I had only gone at once to Sassoon here and personally taken up the loans. Now it's too late,—unless, Smyrna at once helps us out. That will not be for two days.

"And if the sealed hatches are opened, all is lost! The jig is up! They will surely confiscate both the vessel and cargo. I should have sent her out into the English channel yesterday!" There was an agonizing call for instant help in the words flashed along across the channel, seeking the sly Bouclair at Smyrna.

"Now, if Captain Nicolo only has the wit! If I can only gain two days!" mused Schnorr, as he sought his solicitors. "Shall I go over and try to placate Sassoon? Ah! Too late!"

And then—Ernest Schnorr feared that his too-roughly worded notice posted in the office had aroused the ire of the distinguished old firm of British merchants.

"Yes! That was the only fatal mistake! They would

have believed anything if I had only gone to them. A personal visit of explanation."

It was three o'clock when the Gravesend boarding steamer slowly approached the huge "Alessandro Cornaro" still lying in the lower Pool.

For once in his life, Captain Enos Drage was in a flutter of wild excitement. Foiled twice, now he came with all the whole power of Britain's crown behind him in the simple mandates of Her Majesty's Government. The getting together of three experts to examine the hull and engines, and the usual red-tape legal delays, had eaten up the golden hours of the earlier day.

But, the captain's heart beat high as the stoutly built Customs tug neared the great tramp steamer. There was nothing whatever to be seen in the way of flag or signal! Not even a thread of smoke issued from the great funnels, and the chief of the boarding party anxiously communed with the tug captain.

"Bless my soul, if I can see a way to tackle that fellow. There's not a single sign of life on board. Run the tug all around her."

As the tug slowly circled the steamer, there was neither ladder nor gangway out. Then rose up a storm of vociferous hails. But the "Ship ahoy!" was no more vain, echoing back unanswered, than the solemn appeals made afterwards, in the name of the law!

A dead silence reigned, and only the swash of the ebbing tide was heard dashing against the "Cornaro's" prow.

"Throw out the grappling hooks with a line! Shin up there, Moulton, and catch our hawser. We will serve the notice of arrest. Make the tug fast to the nearest hawse bitts.

"Look alive!" yelled the tug captain, as the Customs boat for the second time drifted down the river, bumping violently against the bulging sides of the huge, deeply-laden craft. In five minutes, a mystified party wandered over the deserted decks of the "Cornaro."

Not a human being seemed to be on board! There were three boats missing from the davits—a tell-tale sign. And every door and companion way was tightly locked with heavy ship's padlocks dangling from the hasps.

"I'll soon find out the mystery of this most shameful performance!" yelled the raging Customs chief. "Axes there!"

"Hold on! Mr. Officer!" cried the cautious Enos Drage, as he slowly mopped his reddened forehead with his red bandanna.

"I do not know that we are fully justified in breaking open these locked doors. We may seriously hurt our case. Get me a hammer and nails and I'll nail up both these copies of the orders of arrest on the main mast and the cabin door. You can then leave two officers here on guard to watch in our own interests!

"We are held responsible now for the ship and cargo, while they are in our hands. I'll also leave a couple of my own men to handle a boat. Let down the Jacob's ladder, and you can leave your own small boat here also. If an officer of the ship comes aboard, then you can serve him personally with the order of arrest."

"I guess that you're right, Captain Drage!" slowly said the sorrowing officer. "It's a most queer performance. A forty thousand pound ship, and an eighty thousand pound cargo. Nobody seems to own the vessel, and it seems that the queen herself can't get at the cargo. What will you do?"

"Come along with me!" said the energetic Drage. "Put a third set of seals on the hatches, and seal all the doors. Let your coolest officers who remain see it carefully done. Then put me back at Gravesend just as soon as you can. I'll get my final orders from the authorities on this showing soon enough. You had better let your senior deputy go up to town with me and report."

"Where the dickens are all the ship's company?" the puzzled officer demanded. "Hidden in some cozy inn here along the banks, and probably watching us now,

with a dozen glasses, the villains! But, this is the beginning of the end!" proudly cried Enos as he firmly nailed up the "orders of arrest." "It's a gravely punishable offense to remove these, and—I fancy that Captain Dimitri Nicolo won't care to break your seals and so face an English prison. I'd like to see him on the treadmill, though."

As the heavy tug drew away in the shadows of the evening, First Officer Tomasso Corvini was soon gently hovering around the "Alessandro Cornaro," his head covered artfully with a huge umbrella, as he leaned back in a waterman's wherry. And before the baffled but victorious Captain Drage had reported back at London, the facts of the successful seizure of the vessel, Dimitri Nicolo and Ernest Schnorr were both closeted with the acute lawyers who had guided the London affairs of "Komanos and Company" Dismay shone on their crestfallen faces.

"Is there no help? No way out? Think; use skill—money—anything!" demanded the distracted Schnorr after every possible subterfuge had been discussed.

"I must see all the papers and examine the notifications served on you to-morrow, Mr. Schnorr," replied the sly advocate. "If you could only placate Sassoon and Company,—if the expected telegrams would but come along now. But,—let us wait for the counsel of the morning."

And, so, the army of defense slept on its arms, while far away Captain Nicolo's ragamuffin crew were rollicking gayly on shore, under the easy sway of big McGregor and the joyous Jack Masterson.

For the first time, since seeing the chalk cliffs of Albion, Masterson was able to steal away and send a carefully worded dispatch, as well as a hastily scrawled secret report by letter to Captain Drage.

"I've got a way to get all his wishes and orders now," mused Jack, who groaned in the flesh, thinking of buxom Mary Horton only four hours away. "My fortune is made if we can only hold on to them now!" he gayly cried, as he rejoined the hoodwinked McGregor. "And we will hang to the last!"

A jolly circle was gathered in Higginbotham's library to receive the reports of victory from the seat of war. Besides the secret committee, there were the two solicitors who "most unprofessionally" had, for this occasion, waived the decorum of their order and joined the attacking forces in a last council of war.

"There's no possible escape for these sharpers now!" exulted the leading solicitor. "To-morrow we will give a heavy bond, get an order to force an entrance, also obtain an inquest order on the condition of hull and cargo, and then apply for an absolute order for the docking and discharging of the ship—for account of 'whom it may concern!'

"It will take us a couple of days to effect all this. Meanwhile the ship is safe in the hands of the officers. It's a strange story. There never was a ship here that excited such general curiosity. All the newspapers to-morrow will be filled with the wildest stories imaginable. The reporters are swarming around like bees, even now, for the mad excitement of the opium market will be doubled by this delay and litigation. There's a whole year's supply of the English opium trade now under these sealed hatches.

"You had better remain here, Captain Drage, and we will notify you instantly when you can proceed to Gravesend to examine the hull and engines, and have the captive ship towed up to the dock assigned."

The gleeful gathering separated, leaving Captain Drage and the host alone. "I do not see but that your inspectorship and that handsome reward is safe, now, Enos!" heartily cried Higginbotham, "Of course, the opening of the hatches will, at once, prove the falsity of the bogus cargo. We shall arrest, at once, all the parties on board and,—thank God! that Jew fellow, Schnorr, is at the very end of his rope, now!

"For he himself negotiated the London insurances. Though they are risks now all fallen out, still we have all the proofs of the criminal frauds in our own hands, and he cannot escape the law's clutch.

"I shall go at once down the river with a committee of Lloyds and personally verify the bogus cargo.

"I wish every different class of merchandise to be most carefully sampled in bulk, and—then the authorities will decree these frauds to be criminal. As it stands now,—we will hold all, and forfeit both the ship and its cargo, and,—Her Majesty's Government will destroy all this imitation stuff, when the penalties have duly attached. This seizure will effectually break up the practice of these skillfully contrived shipwrecks.

Only your chase past all the handy spots in the Archipelago, Colonel Hozier's dogging them to Gibraltar, and the 'Scottish Chiefs'' stern guardianship, has kept these scoundrels from burning or sinking the 'Alessandro Cornaro.' That was their game. We would have been out over ninety thousand pounds! A huge sum! As it is, we have both their ship and cargo —they have been forced to spend twenty thousand pounds to cover up their attempted fraud,—and,—they are now trapped at last—thanks to your vigilance and to Sassoon!"

Mr. John Higginbotham swelled visibly in triumph as he stalked off to bed, with the air of a Napoleon. Enos Drage was happy at heart, and yet—a thousand vague fears agitated him.

"If I had only one single cask of that oil, ten drums of the figs, ten boxes of the raisins, a sack of the valonia and one box of the imitation opium!" he fretted. "A beggarly half-inch plate of iron is keeping hidden the secret which would turn a hundred thousand pounds over and finally ruin 'Komanos and Company,' our foes. Why did I not burst a hatch?"

Alas! The old captain saw always the stern finger of the law pointing in his direction. "Impossible!" he groaned. "It's almost too good to be true,—to gain both the reward and,—the inspectorship." He paced the floor of his room half the night, long after John Higginbotham had cast away all cares in a triumphant slumber.

"I would be better off on the deck of the 'Cornaro,'" the old man grumbled as he woke next morning, with his iron nerves shaken at last. He started as he saw

himself in the glass—white-faced, aged and trembling. It was an enormous hazard, the vast sums staked on the turn of the proceedings of the placid solicitors.

One other denizen of London awoke to a day of lingering agony. It was Mr. Ernest Schnorr who had for the hundredth time counted up the difference of longitude between Smyrna and London!

"By Jove! I shall go mad!" he cried as he walked his rooms—for under the pretext of bodily sickness he watched at home the crawling hands of the clock. His messengers haunted the telegraph office, and his crafty lawyer strolled in as the longest day of his life wore away.

The early lights were all lit in London town, and Drage was sullenly devouring John Higginbotham's dinner when Schnorr's chief clerk dashed up in a hansom, and lightly ran up stairs to his chief's room.

There was a half-emptied brandy bottle on the table whereat the ferret-eyed lawyer was seated, calmly smoking and curiously watching the effect of mental anxiety upon the stolid German Jew. Without a single word, Schnorr grasped the telegrams and his face was passion convulsed, as he tore the envelopes open and read the tidings upon which his liberty and fortune both depended.

With a deep sigh of relief the strong man sank back fainting into a chair. While the frightened clerk undid his master's neckcloth and forced some brandy into his mouth, the sneering lawyer calmly picked up the paper.

"Ah! Good news does not kill. He'll come around all right. Let him alone. Pay your man and stay right here. I'll want you to help us all night. We've great work to do, and, there's lots of it!"

There on the table lay the little scrap of a telegram which had turned the defeat into the possibility of a future victory:

"Sassoon's advances are all repaid. Smyrna agents will wire them now. Demand your bills of lading.

Settle for any contingent profits claimed. Send the ship instantly out of British waters.—Bouclair."

"Rouse yourself! Get up! Be a man, Schnorr!" roughly said the lawyer. "Now, listen! 'Sassoons' won't get their cable till the counting house opens. You must be there to act the first instant. Get out to-night and find a half dozen good bondsmen! Have plenty of money at hand to settle with Sassoon. They may claim as an earned profit the market difference on the goods. You had better telegraph to your Captain Nicolo to come, at once, to my office. Let him take a special engine.

"I'll be working all night on the needful papers for the release. Give him all your private directions yourself; no writing. I will have the order of arrest instantly vacated, and it can go down with Nicolo.

"Then, once that the law officers are off the ship, get her out into the channel, anywhere,—but out from under the cursed British flag.

"It will save you doing ten years' time,—your fortune and—possibly a transportation 'for life!'"

Ernest Schnorr's trembling hands clasped his lawyer's arm. "Hurry! Don't fail me now, for Heaven's sake! I'll pay,—pay anything. I can easily make more money. I have had such frightful dreams,—the prison,—the treadmill,—the lash!"

"You're a smart fellow, but you are, after all, a coward at heart. See how game this Emile Bouclair is," the lawyer cried, derisively.

"Yes, but he is safe, out in Smyrna."

And even then the dark Fates were spinning,—silently spinning,—as a gleaming-eyed woman looked out in Smyrna bay, and thirsted for one glance of the passion-filled eyes of Dimitri the Greek!

"Beware!" muttered the dreaming Agathe. "No English prison for my Nicolo!"

When the lawyer had departed, Ernest Schnorr's nerve had quickly returned.

In a few broken words he gave his clerk verbal di-

rections to cause Corvini and McGregor to be ready to instantly second Nicolo in his departure.

"Tell them to be ready with every detail. There's coal enough on board to run over to Brest or Cherbourg. Have all the men ready. Nicolo will have an open credit, and the 'Cornaro' can be coaled and provisioned over there in France. Take the first morning train, stay down there at the Kentish arms; wait for my telegrams and don't come back till all is over. There's a fifty-pound note. Keep the change!"

While Captain Enos Drage chafed in his inactivity and slowly took his way down town the next morning, Agent Ernest Schnorr and his solicitor were the very first callers in the counting rooms of Messrs. Sassoon and Company.

The astonished manager found no words to resist the vehemence of the visitors, backed up by the repeated cablegram from Smyrna, announcing the complete discharge of all their liabilities by Caspari and Company.

"I will thank you to send someone to represent your house and to certify to the complete transfer of all your rights of ownership to my client, Mr. Schnorr," said the acute lawyer.

"If our large ship loses a single tide, we will hold your house responsible for these past proceedings. Of course, your representatives who have illegally tied us up are to be mulcted in these costs. We only wish to save your eminent house damages and scandal. Your advances were all repaid yesterday."

It was too true! "Sassoons" were regularly "in a hole!"

In two hours a light launch was skimming down the Thames with the velocity of a torpedo boat!

A telegraphic order of release had preceded the dispatch boat on which Captain Nicolo, the lawyer and the now truculent Ernest Schnorr were excitedly conferring. When the great four-master loomed up in view there was already dense smoke pouring out from her funnels. With a triumphant shout, Captain Dimitri Nicolo leaped on board!

The red face of McGregor beamed upon him, as in his shirt sleeves he stood with the excited Jack Masterson ready to receive the captain's orders.

"Full steam!" yelled Nicolo to McGregor. "A month's extra wages to the stokers if we turn the screw in two hours! You'll get all you want in coal and supplies at Brest or Cherbourg!"

"Where are we off to then?" harshly demanded McGregor.

"You'll get your orders by telegraph when you report from the French coast," said Agent Schnorr, warily.

But, Jack Masterson, on the watch, heard the last whispered word "Smyrna!"

"We must send a boat ashore for the men's dunnage!" cried McGregor. "You go, Jack! I'll watch over your fires!"

The cutter soon leaped away from the ship's side, and the victorious Jack Masterson grinned as he paid for a telegram which took the bitter news of a crushing defeat to Enos Drage. "By Jove! The old man will have the whole British navy chasing after us tomorrow!" he roared.

"I'll stick to the ship! Old 'Shun Lee' will strike Smyrna before we do—or I'm a lubber!"

When the Secret Service launch shot down along the banks of the Thames three hours later, there was no huge four-master lying there shackled to the great red buoy!

Enos Drage raved in fury as, racing along to the first river bend, he saw the great bulk of the "Alessandro Cornaro" swinging steadily down in the middle current, her white flag with the black circle and K, defiantly gleaming out in the afternoon sun. She was now dashing down toward Sheerness at a fifteen-mile gait!

"Fooled,—dished out of a fortune, and betrayed! There goes my inspectorship to Davy Jones!" roared the half-crazed Enos.

"Run me into Sheerness! I'll take the first train

back there, and Lloyds' Secret Committee can then get another man! They have let the whole fortune of 'Komanos and Company' slip through their fingers! Curse old John's confident stupidity! If he had only bought that Jew's bill of lading!"

For Enos Drage knew now that Isaac Meyer had only groaned in horror: "My God! I sold it yesterday!" when Arrowsmith, racing around London, found him and offered ten thousand pounds for the thirty-four cases of opium. It was a clear case of haste and hurry, robbing the Hebrew, who groaned: "I sold a day too soon!"

When the stars shone down on the muddy Thames the "Alessandro Cornaro" was far out in the stormy channel and was safe in French waters, before the frantic Secret Committee had listened to Drage's reading of Masterson's last telegram.

Then, with a mighty bang of his fist, John Higginbotham leaped up and roared: "Enos! Take the morning train for Southsea! Fix yourself! Get the Southampton boat at midnight!

"Get over to Smyrna as quick as steam and rail will carry you! I myself will guarantee the whole twenty-five thousand pounds bonus to you!

"And—Lloyds will back you to the last, unlimited! We will fight them—fight there to the death, on their own ground! You must be the first man aboard that ship when she comes in, and the Minister and Admiral, too, will back you up!"

"Good!" heartily cried Walden and Waddingham. "And we will stand in to the last guinea!"

So "Shun Lee" Drage girded himself for war! It was by a common impulse that the two juniors rose to leave the irate John Higginbotham to give his final counsels to the bronzed old sailor, who was now going to face the victorious "Komanos and Company" in their hold at Smyrna!

They were perfectly willing to leave all the responsibility now with the man who had made a mess of the whole thing! When their Chairman followed

them to the door, he whispered: "I will have a meeting at noon to-morrow of the whole Board of Directors of Lloyds. I wish you both to be present!"

"See here, John," said Walden, "they will surely kill old 'Shun Lee' out there! They know his face now, you see!"

"Not a bit of it!" said Higginbotham. "It's only an open fight now! I will follow that bogus cargo to its unlading, if I pay every cent of the expenses myself!

"The English Consul, the Admiral, the Minister, will all have full directions to officially aid Captain Drage, and I'll send the 'Conqueror' at once over to Athens to wait for him there. He can live there on board—and under the guns of the fleet! Now! I dare them to touch the old man under the shadow of the Union Jack!"

"But who will do the secret work?" persisted Waddingham. "Van Lennep is now known in Smyrna as the cause of this hot chase!"

"Ah! This nervy young American of Drage's is there!" smiled John Higginbotham. "He is going to marry that lovely grand-niece of our old campaigner! So he can be the outside influence! They have never suspected him, and old Jack Masterson is off too with the ship! He can post all our people 'on the quiet.'

"I have already telegraphed to every Lloyds' agent on the whole French and Spanish coast to watch and report as to the voyage of this lumbering old runaway.

"Every available steamer master will have orders to speak her and report her location by telegraph for the next month! So, we will at last hound them to bay! If they go into any but a Turkish port, we will have the cargo out of her in a jiffy, just as soon as she makes a customs declaration anywhere. Of course if she only calls for coal, we can't seize her; but the first legal declaration of entry puts her at last in our power!"

"And if she goes into a Turkish port?"

"Wait and see what our Minister and Admiral will do!" growled old John. "Be surely on hand now at twelve, sharp!"

"I should say the Chairman was a bit stirred up," said Walden, as they descended the stair.

"There'll be some bloody work now—that fellow Bouclair will work like a fiend for revenge! It's a bad business, and John has made a very bungling job!" mused Waddingham.

Men usually are hard on other men's mistakes.

It was two o'clock that night, and the "Alessandro Cornaro" was now nearing the great light on Cherbourg breakwater, driving on at full speed, before Captain Enos Drage had received his last careful instructions.

The stern old man was a bit crestfallen, but he made no open reproach! "Of course 'Sassoon and Company' had to release the bills of lading at once. They were only 'holders through advances at second hands.'

"It was most unfortunate, and we have it all to go over again!" said Enos.

"If you stand by me, Drage, I will stand by you!" cried the Chairman. "Your appointment as Chief Inspector will be voted on at the special meeting tomorrow. For you have done your whole duty, whether I have done mine or not!"

When the men separated for the night they silently drank the bitter cup of defeat! Mr. Ernest Schnorr and his lawyer were still enjoying the delicious triumph of the passing hour, and the secret orders to Dimitri Nicolo were already well on their way to Cherbourg!

"Don't fall asleep now," said the lawyer, as he called for his cab. "You know the old British bull-dog spirit; your fight is not over yet!"

And this premonition weighed heavily upon Schnorr's mind, even in the exultation of the hour. "Bah!" he reflected. "Bouclair is the King of Smyrna! He will soon stop up every gap—and he can fool

those fellows there with their eyes open. The Turks will run as close as hounds on the scent!"

There was the first gleam of joy shining out in Lily Arnot's shaded eyes when her uncle whispered to her that he was now glad to be the bearer of her commissions to Vinton. "I'll soon send him back to you, little woman, and come home myself, too, for the ceremony!" he laughed.

"For, we have won on the double event, though the ship has stolen away! I'm used to a stern chase, and I wish to be in at the death!"

"And, you will see Howard soon?" said the excited girl.

"I take to-night's boat for Havre; a single day spent at Cherbourg to see what the runaway is up to—and then, off to Vienna, Constantinople and Smyrna! Now, what shall I tell him, Lady Bird!"

The old man opened both his willing arms as the loving girl nestled in his bosom.

"Tell him," she whispered—"oh, you must know what to tell him!" cried the happy child, as with a face burning with blushes she fled away to join Miss Lavinia in packing Enos Drage's two portmanteaus.

There was a bulky letter which accompanied a liberal supply of the very same "stationery" which the Lily of Southsea but too well knew was now exhausted.

"Now! I know what you must tell him!" she said, as her martial old uncle bade her good-bye. "Tell him to use up all this paper in writing to me! He will know what to say!"

There had been a little heart wrench when even the brave Lavinia broke down.

"Beware of those fearful men, Enos," she sobbed. "The East! The terrible East! There's Zachary, and—" she burst into tears as the loved one who had died in far away Burmah returned to thrill her lonely heart once more.

"Dear old girl! We will both come back for the wedding soon!" cheerily cried Enos, as he stole a last kiss from trembling Lily Arnot, a sort of flying mes-

sage of Cupid, wafted in the direction where her yearning heart now turned day and night.

And then the brave old Englishwoman clasped "The Child" to her own sorrowing heart, and they mourned together in all the clinging tenderness of gentle womanhood—ever waiting, praying and watching for the return of those who go out into the wide world's snares and pitfalls.

The brief executive session of Lloyds' managers was greatly enlivened by John Higginbotham's manly self-accusation. "I did not appreciate the closed ranks and subtle strength of these banded Levantine swindlers," said he. "I do now! They must have continental accomplices—powerful London confederates—and a vast network of friendly scoundrel pickets outlying their entrenched camps under Turkish misrule. Now, Sassoon's serious position under our mercantile law forced them to bond over the only documents left on which I could have broken these hatches. The peddler fellow, 'Isaac Meyer,' was either a spy or a secret agent of these hidden scoundrels. Arrowsmith, my own broker, posted to him to offer him ten thousand pounds cash for the bills of lading for thirty-four cases of opium, worth only six hundred pounds! The startled rascal blurted out: 'Fool—and I sold out for half price! Why did you not offer me that at first? I've been a blind fool!' The truth is that we have been outwitted, right here in London town!

"Now, to break up this gang forever, I ask the appointment of Captain Enos Drage, R. N., to be Chief Inspector, with full right to use the Lloyds yacht 'Conqueror,' and to cruise in the Mediterranean till we have broken up the illicit gang's operations! I have already sent Captain Drage over to Cherbourg to follow the 'Cornaro' on to Smyrna!

"I gave him carte blanche, at my own expense, and I now ask you to make his appointment permanent!"

There were three distinct interruptions of "Hear! Hear!"—the war cry of the civilian Briton!

When, two days later, John Higginbotham received Drage's telegram from Cherbourg, he smiled grimly as he read:

"Thanks for the permanent appointment! Will win for Lloyds, or else never leave the Archipelago—salary or no salary. Saw Jack Masterson for five minutes, through help of a smart French marine gen d' arme! He has his cue! I'll be posted by him at every stopping place, and I'll meet the 'Cornaro' at Smyrna! She shall be hunted to Nova Zembla, but will have that cargo! Their only recourse is to destroy the ship and cargo—but at their own expense. Every marine insurance agency in Europe is now warned not to underwrite for 'Komanos and Company.' They are blacklisted!" "They'll never shake old Enos off now!" heartily cried John Higginbotham.

"He will follow them like a Ukraine wolf on the trail! The old fighting blood of the Drages is at fever heat!"

And, day by day, now, a secret watch noted every human being who entered the dingy den in Cadogan Buildings, where Ernest Schnorr sat ever on watch, a grim spider in his smoky web!

There was one busy devil now who bore the whole burden of the coming defense of "Komanos and Company."

It was the leaden-eyed Frenchman, Emile Bouclair, who had now secretly vowed the immediate death of Van Lennep! Schnorr's telegram told him that Lloyds were acting openly at last, and that a violent storm would break soon upon them all in the hitherto cloudless skies of Smyrna!

"Cover it all up!" "Yes, I will cover it all up, and I'll cover up this same German dog of an insurance spy!" growled the pitiless Bouclair, as he sat musing in the Grand Hotel Huck, and coldly decided to send Van Lennep to rest forever in the dark cypress cemetery where the mysteriously murdered agent Richardson lay.

"They will have to dig very deep to talk to him

when they get out here! But, how to do the job neatly?" And then, the sturdy ex-convict recalled all his olden bloody days in the far-away steaming swamps of Guiana. And the devil whispered to him in counsel!

The brokerage and mercantile circles of smoky old London town were all aghast at the unceremonious departure of the "Alessandro Cornaro."

The sudden disappearance of the bulk of the visible year's supply of fresh Levantine goods only added to the clamor of the speculators who had rashly "shorted" the market.

In vain did the thoroughly incensed Schnorr point to his posted notice: "Steamer 'Alessandro Cornaro' sailed for Cherbourg to coal and for Continental orders." The irate agent was besieged by speculators working for the rise and toiling for the fall in opium.

The trade journals, too, added to the growing excitement and most sagely warned the market that the giant "Cornaro" might receive "orders" at Cherbourg to return to Gravesend and then break down the market with a crash!

"I am only the mute agent of the owners!" shouted the exasperated Schnorr. "There's not an English shipper holding a single bill of lading for a case on the 'Cornaro.' The steamer never was declared at the customs house! She is clear of debt and law! If you will have further news, then write over to 'Komanos and Company'—telegraph—or else go there yourselves. I have my own business to attend to—and not yours!"

It was undeniable that Ernest Schnorr spoke the truth. The Levantine trade was lashed into a ferment of excitement, for the telgraphed answers of many Smyrna agents only added to the general unrest.

The "Cornaro's" cargo had stripped the home market, and the sly holders in Smyrna demanded top London spot prices for fresh goods, allowing nothing for risk, freight, insurance and interest, as well as the middleman's profit.

And then, when the Greek and Italian London houses all joined in the upward wave of excited speculation, curses loud and deep followed the crafty speculators who had juggled with the richest cargo which the Levant had ever furnished!

A vanished mystery, simply a mystery, remained the "Cornaro" and her cargo! For twenty London operators now knew by private advices that she had coaled and "proceeded on her voyage," the gray mists of the Channel hiding the great ship, whose defiant captain and imperturbable agent locked up their secrets in their breasts!

And at last, the "nine days' wonder" faded from the minds of all save the veiled combatants fighting their duel at long range over those still closed and sealed hatches of the huge tramp!

Mr. Isaac Meyer had resentfully avoided Ernest Schnorr when they met at that "Kosher" restaurant, the famed "Einstein's Coffee House."

In vain the portly Rebecca, her hopeful offspring clinging to her ample bosom, tendered the olive branch. "He just made a fool of me and swindled me out of half the profits on my goods!" mourned Meyer, to whom a prospective blackmail was a positive loss, although he had really juggled six thousand pounds out of bills of lading worth but six hundred, even at panic prices—which remark, being reported back to Schnorr, the agitated agent then remembered his lawyer's gloomy warning.

He rose up, his eyes gleaming in cunning, and made his way cautiously over to Meyer. "I'll give you five hundred pounds now if you'll make a clean breast of it! Who was it who wanted to outbid me on your opium? If you'll post me all along on this in future, I'll give you the money now!"

The delighted Meyer submitted coyly. "When I've the money, I will really open your eyes!" he sullenly said. "You're now in a great danger, Mr. Ernest Schnorr!"

There was a last solemn Hebraic pledge which

passed between them, which made them both tremble.

"Now," said Schnorr, after he had handed over his check, and the exultant Rebecca received an order a la Lucullus for a breakfast for two, "tell me the whole thing!"

And then, Isaac Meyer opened all the flood gates of his soul. "It was Arrowsmith, old Higginbotham's broker, who wanted that bill of lading to hold your ship and make you 'break bulk.' The old fellow, Drage, who went down with me, was Lloyds' chief inspector, and Arrowsmith offered me ten thousand pounds for my bill of lading an hour after the Sassoons had released your ship!"

The two heads bobbed closely together for an hour, and Mr. Ernest Schnorr was secretly trembling at heart when he paid the bill with good grace, chucked the greasy oriental beauty Rebecca under the chin, and left the shades of "Einstein's."

He knew now how adroitly Meyer had followed old "Shun Lee" Drage, and had caused him to be dogged over to Southsea, Southampton and Cherbourg. "There's big money in the market now, and I know—from my own secret partners—that the old inspector is off for Smyrna! For he has already passed Vienna on his way to Constantinople. Look out for yourself! You know very well who you are fighting now!"

The startled Ernest Schnorr knew but too well! "I may as well be ready to take a run myself over to the Continent!" he mused. "For no man, no men, no firm, can stand up long against 'Lloyds'!"

There were the gloomiest fears in the adroit scoundrel's darkened soul. "Ah! I have it! The evidence! Van Lennep must not be there when this old fool arrives! He has gone to the crafty British Minister at Constantinople! I'll telegraph at once to Bouclair! He must not lose a single moment now, and I, too, will be ready to move. I can make an excuse—'family affairs in Germany!' 'Pressing affairs!'"

Agent Schnorr went to the office of the Cable com-

pany himself. "That fixes Mr. Van Lennep!" he growled, as he went into the nearest public house after sending his dispatch and drained an unaccustomed glass of raw brandy.

In the gray of the early morning of the next day Howard Vinton stole out of the Hotel Huck at dawn. The "Eros" was hauled up near the boat steps, and the anxious young American was glad to once more escape the heat of the fever-breeding sun by a run down the bay. He sighed to be alone and to commune with his thoughts.

He had received a message which caused his heart to leap for joy. The word "Coming," signed "Drage, Vienna," told him of a welcome relief. While Sergeant Foley ran down and beckoned for the skiff, Howard Vinton fixed his eyes upon Agathe Mitis' darkened windows!

In vain Vinton had tried to read the riddle of the connection of this strange woman and her brutal master and tyrant, Bouclair. He very well knew that only fear now joined the ill-mated adventurers.

All Smyrna knew that some strange foreign episode had made the "Alessandro Cornaro" famous, as the two telegraph offices were haunted by excited speculators and correspondents! While Van Lennep was pestered with gossips, Bouclair moved around with an easy smile upon his lips.

And yet the runners and messengers had thronged to Bouclair's doors for the past twenty-four hours.

As the anchor of the "Eros" rattled up, one shutter of Agathe's room opened slowly, while Howard Vinton gazed at a fluttering hand. Would she detain him? Was the signal meant for him? The Turkish guard no longer watched her door at night. He stood irresolute as Sergeant Foley approached with the skiff.

"Ah!" he gasped, as a dark, shrouded form emerged from the side alley door of the sleepy hostelry. It was a Turkish woman, who held a bunch of red roses in her hand!

In a few moments Howard Vinton had joined her in the dingy alley.

Agathe grasped the young man's hands in her trembling palms and drew him into a deep-groined doorway.

"For God's sake, watch over Van Lennep! Those devils are plotting his murder daily! If he leaves the heart of the town he will be butchered! Why does he not fly? Have him followed secretly by his friends wherever he goes! Even my own wretched life is at stake now!

"Some one has betrayed 'Komanos and Company!' The 'Apollo' will be here, perhaps to-day! Watch at your windows every night that she is in port! I will come to you, as before, through the window! But, only to fly! For, Beberovich has promised to find me a safe hiding place! Once on board of his ship, I am safe! But the road is one of peril! It is my life or his—now!

"Watch for me! I will disclose all when I get safe where I can get a message to Nicolo!

"For he and I, will soon desert 'Komanos and Company' forever! Go, now! Remember! Watch for the 'Apollo'! Then you must help me to get safely out of the hotel! Seek Van Lennep out at once—this very day!"

With the energy of despair, she pushed him out into the street. As he descended the steps to the skiff he saw the elastic form dart back across the alley!

And as the "Eros" gathered headway there was a white signal flashing for a moment at the window before it was closed and barred within.

"Take a tack in toward the Consulate, Foley," gravely said Vinton. "I've had a warning! They are dogging Van Lennep to kill him to-day!"

"My God!" gasped Foley. "He went down toward the Point this morning to the old warehouses to look at some goods. He has his driver with him, and Melloni told me last night he would follow after Van Lennep at a safe distance.

"For the brave German is chivalrously fearless, and he is well armed! He dares not go around with a public escort; it would gall his Teutonic pride! He is an old soldier, too!" "Let me see," quickly said Vinton, glancing around.

"Four of us, and there's Van Lennep, his driver and Melloni. And we have the boat! By Jove! We will just run down to the storehouses on Dragoman's Point. You can land and find him, and he must come back in the boat with us! And even Melloni! Any lounger will ride his horse back! I will make the consul guard him now every moment. He must! He shall! I shall insist that Van Lennep leaves town and goes over to Athens till the new agent comes!"

They were stretching away on a long leg down towards Dragoman's Point now, and the dainty "Eros" lay over and dashed the feathery spray from her flying bow. "If anything should happen it would surely be on the way back," said Howard Vinton. "He would be missed if he did not keep his appointment!"

"Yes! But it is a spookish place down there," said Foley. "The warehouses are always closed up from eleven to three. Suppose that he has been lured down there," gravely said Foley.

And the agonized haste of Agathe the Serpent lent a new potency to all the American's natural misgivings! "It would be very easy to entrap him there among the crowd of mongrels who always hang around Dragoman's Point."

By a saucy bit of marine foppery, the dainty "Eros" flew the Union Jack, and every boatman on the Bay now knew the English "Milord's" sailing cutter.

"Run her in close to the shore!" said Vinton, as they neared the point, some three leagues below Smyrna, on the southern shore. "Van Lennep well knows our rig, and also so does your Turkified Irish dragoman friend, 'Melloni'! If I live till this evening, by Jove, Van Lennep shall either go and lodge on the war ships or else leave the city! He shall not throw his life away!"

The watchful Foley had carefully examined his arms, and he at once bade the two boatkeepers do the same. "You can take a man, and the other will stay with me, and bring Van Lennep down to the boat!"

The long road was clearly visible stretching far along the curved shore, and Sergeant Foley was most anxiously sweeping the strand with Vinton's boat glasses.

"Holy Smoke! There's a fellow lying down on the point here just beyond the rocky bend, and making eager signals to us! Look sharp!

"Run her in right there where the little patch of scrub trees are. He's got that between him and the road! He is waving, too, for all he is worth. He sees our British flag!"

In five minutes, Vinton and Foley excitedly leaped out into the clear water rising to their waists, holding their pistols high over their heads.

"Jump ashore with my fowling piece! Loosen the skiff! Bradford, you mind the boat! Come on, Allen!" cried Vinton, as he saw Dragoman Melloni slowly crawling on his hands and knees to the edge of the little shelving bank.

"What's up, mate? For Heaven's sake!" yelled Sergeant Foley.

"They ambushed me—four of them—and knocked me off my horse! I wounded one, and then cleared out down the road, going after Van Lennep! My pistol evidently frightened them! They have all got swords! Hurry, hurry to the big warehouses! Go, all of you! Here! Take this extra pistol. I've one left. Bradford can get me aboard! It's only my leg! The scimitar blade turned on my hard head and the blow only knocked me silly! That's all! Hurry, for Heaven's sake. Hurry!"

The three men were on the double quick already trotting along smartly toward the warehouses, not five hundred yards away.

As they approached, but one great door of the old

caravansera was opened. There was no other sign of life!

Panting, Howard Vinton pointed to the door. There was a horse and droschky at the far end of the old buildings, drawn up there in the shade of the masonry walls. Suddenly the crack of a heavy revolver rang out from the interior, followed by a loud yell of pain, and a second shot rang out as Howard Vinton, pistol in hand, dashed into the gloomy interior!

There, in a corner, a knot of men with flashing swords were hacking at something which had fallen against the angle of a pile of bales!

The bang of the three pistols echoed in one deafening explosion, and a swarthy swordsman pitched forward with his arms sprawled out and lay prone at the feet of the insensible Van Lennep! There was the rush of flying feet and a yell of pain as Foley winged a fugitive dashing along to the dark interior beyond. "Hasten! Raise him! Get him out of here! They'll all be down on us soon like a swarm of hornets!"

The three men clutched the wounded German, who lay senseless with his pistol still grasped in his hand. Foley quickly snatched it and shouted a command to the driver as they bore their burden to the door. The frightened driver lashed up his horse as he saw the group waving their hands. "Look to his wounds at once, Vinton!" cried Foley, as with pistol in hand he urged the vehicle down the road to the beach below the point, where the "Eros" lay awaiting them. Before the carriage stopped Bradford was pulling the skiff along toward the shore from the boat.

The yells of a gathering mob sounded out on their ears! Before their eyes, the frightened driver cut the traces and then galloped away on the frightened horse! The wounded German was already half way to the boat, aided by Howard Vinton and Allen, when Sergeant Foley turned and faced the howling mob armed with scimitars, sticks, daggers and stones.

He stood with a cocked pistol in each hand, calmly resolute and with his blue Irish eyes flashing. As two

brawny wretches sprang down the bank, Foley fired point blank into their faces!

One of them rolled in dying agonies almost to his very feet, and the other, with a wild yell, clambered up the slope, dropping his bared sword.

There was only a dozen strokes more needed to bring the skiff to Foley's side, when he rushed into the water up to his armpits, and turning quickly fired every barrel into the huddled throng.

Then, tossing his pistols in the boat, he cried: "Give way! I'll hang on and tow!"

Stout hands soon hauled him on board, and with a toss of her dainty prow the "Eros" dashed out into the stream, followed by a chorus of savage yells.

"Van Lennep?" gasped Foley, as he shook the water off. "All right!" answered Vinton. "Five nasty slashes, but, only one deep one! I've got a handkerchief twisted on his leg! They must have knocked him down and ran in to finish him!"

"And you, Melloni?" "Good for another row! Give me just a pull of your flask!"

"Now, to the flag ship as quick as you can crack on!" cried Vinton. "Van Lennep shall not ever set foot on shore again till his relief comes! The navy surgeon will soon fix you men up. I'll get to the Consulate to make a statement!"

Foley grinned. "Bless you! You'll never hear of this! These fellows will keep their own secrets. The droscky fellow will fetch the horses back, and those two brutes that we polished off will be hidden away."

"Not a word of the affair to anyone!" said Vinton. "I want to watch Mr. Emile Bouclair!" And, strangely enough, not a word of the sharp struggle ever reached Smyrna!

That night four stalwart men in plain clothes watched with Sergeant Foley in his room, while Vinton waited at his window

The enraged Consul Fitzgerald was the cause of the presence of the guard in plain clothes, deftly introduced one by one from the marines of the fleet.

"I will have the whole official crowd here bastinadoed—I swear I will—if another man under my protection is assaulted!" he cried, as he took down the confidential statements of Van Lennep and the brave dragoman Melloni, whose acuteness had saved Van Lennep's life.

"Either 'Komanos and Company' shall be driven from Symrna or else I'll haul down my own consular flag. I propose to take a hand in the game now, and they may hear the barkers of the British lion roar! The whole place is a moral pesthouse!"

When Fitzgerald flatly told Vinton he was a hot-headed fool to remain in his dangerous vicinity to Bouclair, the young fellow only laughed. "I'm not afraid of him! We're both going to start on a long journey soon. He will get out of here, I warrant, when old 'Shun Lee' Drage comes, and I—well, I've just notified the Herald to send another man to watch over the Eastern question. I want to see the yacht races at Cowes this year!"

He strangely forgot to mention the sweet-faced English girl who was praying at home for him on this very night.

"You might take the 'Apollo' and get out to-morrow at eight. She is just coming up the harbor!" earnestly said Fitzgerald. "Why can't you clear out to Athens and stay there till Drage comes? I have a telegram that his yacht, the 'Conqueror,' has just arrived there."

"I'll wait for my English letters!" laughed Howard Vinton. "Just take good care of these two wounded men! So strange! These brutes only slashed at him! If they had known enough to 'give point' both of our friends would have been neatly spitted. But they are bungling cowards!

"Now, your marine guard of four men is just as good as an army!" There was not a single human being in Smyrna who knew where Van Lennep and Alfred Melloni were concealed.

Not even that gray-eyed scoundrel Emile Bouclair,

who found Howard Vinton calmly chatting and drinking with a tall stranger in the open hotel cafe that memorable evening.

The Frenchman's eyes sought Vinton's face, and the young man's polite absence of emotion soon disarmed him. "He is going away! He knows nothing!

"Just a fool!" mused Bouclair, as he turned and went up the stair to the rooms where Agathe the Serpent now watched for the "Apollo" with hungry eyes.

"It must be to-night, or never, that she will tap at my window," mused Vinton. "For this Frenchman is no fool. He is on his guard! He knows the attack failed!"

CHAPTER X.

THE HEGIRA OF ERNEST SCHNORR!—KOMANOS AND COMPANY ELECT A NEW GENERAL MANAGER!—BROUGHT TO BAY!

For the first time in Howard Vinton's singularly romantic love episode, carried on "after the semi-detached manner," he was unable to collect his thoughts to commune with the blue-eyed Lily of Southsea. He folded the letters brought by the "Apollo" and tenderly hid them in his breast.

The clock already showed ten, and his heart beat time to every tick of his watch. There was no sound of merriment, no tinkle of guitar, no thrilling chords of the piano, in the Bouclair rooms adjoining, which were famed as a very dream of oriental luxury.

Vinton's own two outer rooms now closely resembled a guard room, with the four sturdy marine guards furnished by the now over-anxious Consul.

In all the seeming quiet of his surroundings, the American began at last to appreciate the profound dissimulation of Levantine life. There were merry parties of tourists always coming and going.

The clash of glasses and shouts of the players rose

up from the hotel cafe below, where the representatives of a dozen nations always met each other in a well dissembled distrust. The "Apollo" now lay off the front of the mole in full view with her hundred brilliant lights sparkling like jewels in the summer night!

From over the tranquil evening waters, the sounds of stevedore and roustabout shouting at their work were wafted to the open casement. The streets were still thronged with the innumerable loiterers pouring eastward in ranks of four, and sauntering back westwardly along the edges of the still open cafe gardens.

"There will be nothing attempted before midnight," mused Vinton, as he tried in vain to kill time by looking over his last resume of the "Armenian situation."

In his locally assumed aristocratic station, with all the inner avenues of gossip open to him, he had easily gazed through the "gates ajar" and seen the brutal and bloody Turk as he is, in all his sodden corruption of social vice and official rottenness.

The brilliant young writer's timely reviews had inspired the Herald's manager to telegraph back to Smyrna a prayer to Vinton to "hold on," and he was offered a "fat" roving commission to wander from Cairo to Odessa—from Trebizonde to Crete—and to choose his own special lines of work.

But, ambition was dead in the young man's agitated breast! He felt that this very night would be a turning point in the veiled struggle—that the coming of Drage would draw him in deeper, or perhaps send him flying on homeward to London!

Perhaps he would even be asked to join in the chase of the phantom ship. "If she but once passes the Straits of Gibraltar, then Drage will catch her somewhere in the Mediterranean!

"I would like to be in at the death!" he mused. "At any rate, I must be foot loose!" And so he sent the quick-witted Sergeant Foley up to the American Consulate to telegraph his absolute resignation of Herald duties, to take effect on the arrival of his successor.

"See Fitzgerald and find out how both our wounded friends are," he added, "and, as you come back, you may signal to the boat. Go on board and tell the men not to sleep! One of them must be on the watch all the while to-night, and if I open my window once, and just stand there motionless in it, they must be ready to receive me on board. I may have to run out secretly to the cruiser and to see our wounded men. You must come back here then and watch with me!"

There was a profound silence reigning now in the apartment, for Foley and the valet were watching for any sounds indicative of Emile Bouclair's movements. Vinton wearily threw aside the leaves of his very last contribution to the Herald.

It was all vain that he had tried to kill the crawling time. His nerves were still tingling with all the suppressed excitement of the day.

"What a pack of liars in word, and what brutes in action! These Levantines!" he murmured. "There will not be even a single public rumor of the fracas of the morning! The journals, the clubs, the gossips, all at sea. But, does Emile Bouclair know me now as his worst foe—his secret enemy? He seemed to be all unconscious, and yet he has all the arts of an old 'con'!

"Perhaps he thinks that his assassins only bungled the work. But he will soon easily find out that the doomed man was taken off to the cruiser in my boat. He may fear to openly attack an 'English Lord,' as he thinks me to be." The brave young Yankee longed to throw off the mask at last and have it out with his bitter foe at arm's length, face to face, and to fight him to the death in the open!

"The dangerous time is in the interval now until my chief, 'Shun Lee' Drage, arrives. I suppose that he will loosen all the official 'dogs of war' and get orders for the seizure of this ship!"

It was two long hours before Sergeant Foley returned.

"All right, sir!" he whispered, "our men are safe

enough. They will, of course, be sore and stiff for some time with their green wounds, but there is nothing dangerous, thank God! Your dispatch has gone! I just met Frenchy—Monsieur Bouclair—just going down now with a bundle of letters in his hand.

"He went over toward the steamship offices—probably to post his letters by the 'Apollo.' She sails at noon!"

"All right!" whispered Vinton. "You had then better lie down and wait my signal in readiness. I may need you! Don't speak! I will come in and rouse you with my hand if you fall asleep!"

Foley nodded significantly. "They are ready on watch at the boat! They understand!" he huskily whispered, for he, too, shared in the excitement of his master.

Sergeant Foley had a little theory of his own! He had, in fancy, scented his master's approaching departure, and he believed that Vinton was about to cut out the pretty kestrel under the eyes of that grim falcon Bouclair.

"He's been a brute to her—that French beast!" ruminated Foley, who well knew that love laughs at locksmiths, even in the dangerous Orient! Howard Vinton, listening at his closed door, heard Emile Bouclair's heavy, unelastic tread as the sullen schemer deliberately mounted the stair and passed slowly down the corner hall to his own apartments. The American held his breath as the echoes died away.

And then, with a beating heart, Vinton laid his own knife and revolver within reach, and then placing the lamp in a dark corner, turned it down to a mere speck. He loosened the fastenings of his solid window shutters and lay down to wait.

There was no sound from the deserted streets now. The sounds of the gay revelers had all died away! The silence of the closed rooms was most intolerable, for the excited American could almost hear his own heart beat. Overwearied with his intense emotions, his head fell, and he slept at last—how long, he knew

not. It was with a sudden start that he suddenly awoke as a current of cooler air poured in upon his sleeping face. He was upright on his feet in a moment!

There, in the deep set masonry window enclosure stood a figure robed in black, showing out against the farther gloom of the tropic night! Vinton sprang to the window and aided the woman as she lightly leaped to the floor.

"Hasten, for God's sake! Get me to the boat! To your boat first, and then to the 'Apollo'! The captain is even now on the watch! He sent me a message by his man to-night!"

Agathe the Serpent had clasped Vinton's hands, and her own clinging palms were as cold as ice.

"Loosen your door! I will get out at the serving women's side entrance! I am bare footed! You can go out as usual! I will hide and wait for you below at the steps! Hasten! My very life depends on your quickness!"

The desperate woman fled away along the hall like a specter of the night! There were always Orientals moving in and out at all hours.

"Has she met any one?" gasped Vinton, as he raised the light, and standing at the window, flashed it out as he threw both shutters open!

Then closing and bolting the solid blinds tightly, he sprang to Foley's side. "Now, my boy! Jump! Follow me!" he whispered, and then he shook his valet. "I am going to the English cruiser! Let no one come in here! Keep all hands here, and in quiet, till my return! You can go down and bring the breakfast up for these men at the usual time if we are not back!"

Then, Howard Vinton stole out, slipping down the stairway, where a sleepy Turkish porter merely grunted and instinctively raised his head for a moment.

Sergeant Foley was already across the mole, and when Vinton sprang down the steps the light skiff was already weighted with the motionless black shrouded figure at the stern.

"The Turkish guard is still sleeping soundly at Bouclair's doorstep!" whispered Foley, as a few powerful strokes brought the skiff alongside the "Eros," already swinging loose.

Without a word, Vinton threw his boat cloak around the half-fainting woman, and then the great leg of mutton sail was loosened! Under the feebly twinkling stars, the cutter glided along, the elastic water beneath the keel yielding like parted oil. There was not a sign of life around the Grand Hotel Huck, save the one great red lamp feebly glimmering over its entrance!

"Give me the glass," whispered Agathe, as she reached out a trembling hand. Her last look of the rooms, her prison for two long months, was guided by the crimson signal of sudden death, the Turkish sign of blood!

The fresh breeze of morning was already drawing down from the great wooded gorges of the Pagus, and in five minutes, the black hull of the "Apollo" shone out before them, clear-cut, in the summer night. Her masthead lights still gleamed golden!

"Where can I write to you?" Agathe faltered. "Write to Howard Vinton, British Embassy, Constantinople," he briefly answered.

"And you, Agathe!" he earnestly said. "You will want to hear of all of Bouclair's movements and learn what he says!"

"He will say nothing—we have parted, forever!" the trembling fugitive panted, as she suddenly caught Vinton's hand and covered it with burning kisses.

"You have saved my life! I tried to save yours! But, you are safe now! If you stay in the East, I shall always watch over you! We shall meet again! Never fear! When Nicolo escapes from this band of villains, I will have him seek you out, and he will then tell you all! For we will both be safe soon, now! There is nothing to fear any more!

"Here is a little token! Keep it always to remember the poor woman whose life you have saved!"

And Vinton's hand closed upon a ring which she had slipped from her finger! They were now fast nearing the "Apollo," and the helmsman skillfully brought the boat up to the companionway.

A dark form stood there on watch at the lower platform. Lightly as a chamois, Agathe the Serpent leaped out of the cutter and tossed the boat cloak back.

"Be happy, be fortunate, be brave and silent—and may God be with you!" she cried as the boat fell off and quickly drifted astern.

"Where away now?" cried Sergeant Foley.

Howard Vinton had recovered his nerve. "Run over to the cruiser! I'll wait there till daylight, and come off in a ship's boat.

"Foley!" said Vinton, with a sudden premonition, "you must get back at once and moor the boat! Get into my rooms and stay there. Do not leave for an instant! If there is any racket about this fugitive girl, you say I am passing the night on the war vessel, and if there is trouble, you can send to the Consul for protection. Send one of the marines! Silence, whatever happens! I want this Austrian steamer 'Apollo' to get out of the harbor! For, if Bouclair finds this little trick out he will be simply crazed with rage, and the captain will never let her go! There will be bloodshed over her!"

"Ah! You don't know these bloody Turks!" laughed Foley. "They would never dare to search or even to stop an Austrian Lloyds' mail packet! It's a different thing with an old tub of a sea tramp that nobody owns! Oh! Captain Beberovich is a very slick fellow! He will just stow this Greek beauty away in the 'lazaretto' or some other hidden corner of the 'Apollo!' A ten-pound note will easily buy any Turkish Kaimakans in the port! No! Pretty Agathe is safe at last!

"Stole away! and, Frenchy is left! He may have slipped out to one of his secret meetings! And, so, the saucy beauty has given him the slip!

"Why! You can't tell any of these Turkish ladies from their servants, or even the old grandames! The first rig caught up covers any one in the uniform of the Moslem women! An universal provider! Such larks! They are always cutting around Smyrna at all hours of the day and night! It's only the foolish European tourists who blindly keep the lovers' tryst that are followed, and so, run up against the assassin's knife."

Howard Vinton was only reassured when he stood on the deck of the "Euryanthe" and saw his pretty cutter disappear in the shrouding gloom!

There was a distinct bustle upon the "Apollo" which told of all the active preparations for an early departure. "Beberovich is no laggard!" laughed Vinton, as he followed the officer of the deck down to the ward room.

"I'll just take a lay-off on a lounge here, and I don't mind a brandy and soda," said the guest of the night. "I must be on shore again early!"

The American curiously gazed at the bauble which Agathe Mitis had pressed into his hand. It was a superb star sapphire, set with the richest diamonds! He slipped it carelessly on a finger and then turned to take the glass offered by a sleepy ward-room boy.

"Look out, sir!" the English serving lad said. "I'm afraid there is something wrong with that glass! I'll get you another. Your hand is all stained with blood!"

The crystal slipped, ringing down from Howard Vinton's hand, as he nervously started, and it noiselessly broke at his feet.

"I must have hurt myself in the boat!" he murmured, as he removed the stains, and then, draining a fresh glass, lay down to sleep.

It was broad daylight when he awoke, as the stewards began to rattle around for the morning mess-room coffee service.

He was up and out on the gundeck in a trice. The glorious sunlight was flooding Smyrna Bay, and he

rubbed his eyes as he gazed at the vacant anchorage of the "Apollo."

A long black column of smoke far out beyond the outer fort told that the great mail packet was now at sea and hastening back to Stamboul!

"There is near by, Scio,—the Dardanelles, and a dozen other possible hiding places to drop off that most capricious bundle of beauty, Mademoiselle Agathe! Thank God! She is safe, and now to avoid Monsieur Bouclair's first storm of jealous rage!"

He gladly accepted the invitation of a gay lieutenant to join an informal breakfast party at Consul Fitzgerald's hospitable bungalow.

As they swept along up the mole, past the Grand Hotel Huck, there was a gathering crowd of the curious seen running antlike about the great entrance.

"Ah! Monsieur de Crapaud is now raising a tropical storm!" laughed Howard Vinton.

"The windows are all thrown wide open! He is searching far and near. I think I will sport the oak to-day, at the Consul's and just send a messenger down to Foley—'for the latest particulars!'"

The acute American had thoughtfully sworn Sergeant Foley to an absolute secrecy, and—only the beautiful star sapphire ring remained to prove the fleeting of wayward Agathe to be more than a wild dream of the summer night. He most cautiously removed the flashing gem.

"I would not care to have Bouclair see this little love token," he ruminated. It was in the midst of a jolly hour at table that Sergeant Foley, white faced, suddenly broke in upon the hospitable circle.

"There is almost a mob down at the Huck Hotel!" he cried. "Half the Pashas and town officers are running around like mad! And the merchant fellows, too, are wild. This French chap Bouclair was found laid out cold and stiff in his bed, with a dagger driven through his heart! He's been robbed, too, for the windows were found to have been opened!"

"And the beautiful Greek girl," said a laughing

young lieutenant, "carried off! The apartment doors were also unlocked, and the Turkish servant guard is nowhere to be found!"

Howard Vinton gasped for breath as he met Foley's meaning glances. In a single quick drawn inspiration he saw the whole secret revealed!

The blood of the last night upon his hands. It was the unconscious betrayal of Agathe the Serpent who had cut her way to freedom, through the portals of Bouclair's wicked heart!

"I must speak to you a moment, Foley!" said the American, quickly starting up. And as the Consul broke out in wondering ejaculations, Vinton cried: "Take a carriage! Hasten back. Bring my boat up, and moor it here, off the Consulate!"

"It's all right!" whispered Foley. "I've done it already. Stay here and enjoy yourself. You had better come down with the Consul, but only in a couple of hours. I'll hold the fort. She's off, clear and safe—and—I'm right glad she did it! Mum's the word! Nobody suspects her!"

And then Howard Vinton grimly held his peace. "Komanos and Company will now need a new general manager!" he mused. "Half of Enos Drage's work was done—in that quick midnight knife thrust! God help her! It was her sworn revenge for the brute's beating."

Consul Fitzgerald named the senior naval officer present to direct the impromptu feast. "You had better drive down to the hotel with me, Vinton. This may be a serious affair," gravely said the official. "And we will be back in an hour or so."

In ten minutes, the two friends were speeding along the mole. Howard Vinton was preoccupied, and his eyes instinctively sought his hands to see if the telltale blood stains were still visible.

"You have no idea how this rascal met his death?" murmured Fitzgerald. Howard Vinton shook his head. He could not bring himself to betray the poor hunted victim of man's grossest vice.

"I think that the time has now come for you to remove to my household. There will be a great hubbub over the killing, and it is a very good excuse," continued the Consul.

"I shall, officially, call on the Fleet Captain and we will both of us see the governing Pasha. I shall then duly notify him that such daring crimes must be at once suppressed, and warn him to protect all the British subjects here. If he has been in a secret league with Komanos and Company, he will of course slur over this killing. For—Emile Bouclair dead, loses at once his power of earning backsheesh!"

The mart of Smyrna was lashed to a fever of excitement by the audacious crime of the night. It needed all the efforts of the two forerunners with their wands and the bawling cavasse with his silver staff of office, to clear a way through the excited Moslem crowd. The official carriage of the French Consul, too, was already at the door of the Hotel Huck.

As Fitzgerald descended from his vehicle, the chancellor of the French Consulate politely accosted him. "Monsieur le Consul waits with the German and American Consul to confer with you, above. This may become a matter of inquest, before the Mixed Court. The café here is already crowded with all the superior Turkish officers of the city!"

When Howard Vinton reached the grand entrance, Fitzgerald said:

"Wait for me in your rooms. Answer no questions unless they are put to you in my presence. Let your men, at once, pack up all your effects. Then Foley and your valet can remove them all, later!"

When Howard Vinton gazed out from his own windows he saw a heavy guard of zaptiehs driving away the gathering crowds. Only recognized members of "society" were allowed to pass the lines, but the curious crowds hovered around below gazing up at the corner rooms where death had stolen in like a thief in the night.

Vinton exchanged glances with Foley, as the entire

body of inmates proceeded to hastily pack up "his Lordship's" effects.

"Did the hotel people find out anything of this strange occurrence?" asked Vinton.

"Nothing, sir!" answered the sergeant. "Only the Turkish servant of Bouclair has vanished, as well as the old woman. That looks bad for them. The hotel servants saw nothing unusual. The doors of the hotel are always open at night. These Moslem attendants run in and out without notice. The proprietor wishes to pay his respects to you."

"Let him come up!" remarked the American, who interrogated his valet and the four marines, who had been the secret guard of the mysterious "British aristocrat." "Not a sound of any struggle, nothing unusual!" Such was the general verdict.

Vinton breathed freely. "I can safely trust Foley. So, the return came sooner to this cowardly assassin, at second hand, than the ordinary grinding of the mills of the gods. His veiled attack on poor Van Lennep was a deadly boomerang. The poor woman must have laid her plans, too, with great skill. The 'Apollo' is now leaving Scio and she has found out the safest hiding place, to wait for Nicolo, her lover!"

The profuse regrets of the hotel manager were at once tendered when that functionary appeared.

"I was intending to leave Smyrna soon," cordially remarked Vinton, "and it is of course natural that I should prefer the quiet of my friend's residence, to the disturbed atmosphere of the hotel. If you should need me in any way, you can apply to the Consul. What was the motive?"

The hotelkeeper mused. "It is doubtful," he slowly said. "The late Monsieur Bouclair kept money and jewels in his rooms. They are superbly decorated. There seems to have been a bold robbery. The woman's entire belongings are scattered about, but her jewels are all gone. It looks as if he had been slain for revenge, and she gagged and carried away, probably to hide the crime.

"There is an intense fever of speculation on the market here, and this missing ship, the 'Cornaro,' has been the means of ruining hundreds. There is a great mob of people interested who are left in ignorance of all, by the sudden death of this man. The French Consul is personally in charge."

"My man will remain and settle all my affairs," said Vinton. "I shall be found at the British Consulate."

As the manager retired, bowing and scraping, Consul Fitzgerald entered hastily. "Come here, Vinton! I wish you as an official witness!"

They silently strode into the adjoining suite of rooms. Vinton's eyes roved curiously around the gathered luxury, and he bowed in silence to the half-score of consuls, doctors and official attendants. In a corner on a divan, the governing Rustem Pasha sat cross-legged, gazing inertly at the throng with leaden eyes.

A captain of harbor Gendarmerie stood at the Turk's side, while a couple of Moslem scribes were working away with stylus and notebooks. Cigarettes were in everyone's mouth, but the Pasha only puffed a chibouque. The scratch, scratch of pens of the busy Consular chancellors was the only sound breaking the stagnant silence of the chamber of horror.

Fitzgerald silently led Vinton up to the great brass bedstead, wherein, his blackened heart's blood still soaking the mattresses, lay the brawny form of the dead Bouclair, its heavy angular outlines visible beneath the single sheet. The French Consul stood at the head of the bed.

"Here is my witness," whispered Fitzgerald. At a sign the attendants then threw off the coverings and rolled the nude corpse roughly over.

"Please to note with care!" said the French official, "the branded letters 'T. F.,'—and the back seamed with the olden scars of the 'matraque.'"

Howard Vinton gazed as the Frenchman said: "Travaux forcés!"—the mark of the galley slave,—

and,—the back,—the record of the often disciplined obdurate criminal. "I wish the record of this inspection made by all my colleagues. I shall institute a close inquiry. The papers of citizenship used by the deceased are undoubtedly those of some dead man of repute whose fair name this person used."

"And his estate?" said Fitzgerald. "His property will be all held subject to the order of the home authorities. Probably an escaped convict, he had no legal rights whatever,—and there is, after all, probably only this gaudy furnishing here. His office I have already locked up and sealed.

"His personal valuables were stolen and his private papers are no doubt in the hands of confederates. There is here only the personal outfit of the woman who has disappeared. The Greek Consul will of course remove these. And I shall leave the Turkish law to handle his affairs of business. I shall not intervene. The deceased always avoided the French Consulate. There is hardly enough here to bury him, and pay the official expenses."

Howard Vinton was standing gazing down at the stern face of the slain,—with its heavy sensual features. The waxen yellow of death was quickly bringing out the animal nature shown by the vanishing mask of polite self control.

A medical attendant carelessly covered up the gruesome visage, after pointing significantly to the gaping wound over the heart. On a table lay the keen Circassian dagger which had been driven home up to the silver haft.

The American walked alone around the three rooms and curiously noted the condition of the whole apartment.

There were scattered garments, the debris of a feast, a still open piano, a table with its litter of scattered journals, cigarette cases and open cigar boxes, and a handsome guitar with its blue ribbon, lay across an easy chair.

"There is no sign of any struggle," said the British Consul to his French colleague.

"It looks as if he had been surprised in a drunken stupor, and easily butchered like a dog."

"Probably the servants were bribed to let the thieves in, one by one, into the other room," said the cold Frenchman. "You see that there are two entrances. The woman was probably surprised and gagged in her room, and then, quickly dragged away. It may be that the thieves have rifled his business papers. There is an open desk which seems to have been rummaged. But, va banc! The fellow is dead! That is all.

"I shall give the Pasha my official decision and then leave the details to my chancellor. I really have no interest, further. France has lost nothing by this scoundrel fellow's death!"

"But his business,—the interests of others in his hands," said Fitzgerald.

"Ah! mon ami!" lightly remarked the Gallic official, "Smyrna has only lost one scoundrel! There are fifty 'declasses' here now, ready to take his place. I have the official list of every respectable resident Frenchman, in my Consulate. I always take the verdict of my Consular colleagues upon these citizens. I never admit a merchant to my table, without a secret inquiry! And,—this very dead man here was the ringleader of the worst gang of swindlers in the Orient,—'Komanos and Company,'—who are just anybody and everybody. The Forty Thieves! There is no such firm, only a lot of low cutthroats and swindlers!

"Like our 'Foreign Legion' in Africa,—the rejected of all nations. They will soon find another scoundrel to lead them. I have secretly watched the man for several years. He was careful to have no French business connections, so I could not trap him officially. He always operated on the plethoric pockets of fat John Bull. I did not care to go the way of poor Richardson, for my unnecessary curiosity. We

can better spare him than any other man in Mercury's thieving circle here.

"Probably his angered confederates may have killed him on account of this 'Alessandro Cornaro' fiasco! I have now a telegram from the French admiral at Malta to watch that very boat. It put in at Cherbourg for coal only. If they attempt to show a French Customs clearance here I will seize the vessel. It is coaling at Malta now, on its way back here. Somebody has lost ten thousand pounds in foolish expenses on this thing. And there is the reward of Komanos and Company to their discarded leader."

The light-tongued Frenchman calmly lit a cigarette from Bouclair's own store, and strolled out, after a few gravely ominous words addressed to the Pasha.

"I have telegraphed for a French war vessel, Effendi," he menacingly said. "Let this be the last French blood shed." He pointed to the cadaver now in the hands of the three doctors, at work on their proces verbal.

"Lightly they'll speak of the spirit that's gone."

"And o'er his cold ashes upbraid him!" muttered Vinton, as he watched the lazy Pasha turn pale under Fitzgerald's vigorous remark.

"If there is another single foreigner killed here in six months I will land a couple of companies of marines and have the harbor patrolled by our guard boat day and night. Smyrna is the haunt of every assassin in Asia Minor. A man's life is not safe out of the sight of the Consulates. I shall call on you with our naval commanders, as to the brutal attack on Mr. Van Lennep."

The Pasha shivered within his embroidered uniform, though the day was of a sweltering heat.

"Effendi! Effendi!" he groaned, clutching at Consul Fitzgerald's coatsleeve. "Say not so! Say not so! Spare me! The Grand Vizier will remove me! I swear by the beard of the Prophet that the Frank Van Lennep shall have ten thousand pounds in gold,

by to-morrow night. I know these scoundrels who would have killed him! They shall pay!"

The Consul turned then and faced the gibbering old Turk.

"At the Consulate,—by to-morrow night,—the whole sum?"

"I swear it!" the humbled Pasha cried.

"Then, I will not telegraph to Constantinople," said the sly Fitzgerald.

"Hark you! See yon young Frank with me? He is a British Lord,—a great Howadji, a man of great social value. He is my own guest. If one hair of his head is touched here I will have the town bombarded!"

"He shall be covered with the sleeve of the Prophet's gown. Night and day he shall be watched!"

"He is lodged in my house, from to-night!" grimly said Fitzgerald, "and he is a brother to every commander of an English war vessel. See to it! Take notice!"

The Turk cowered in fear.

Howard Vinton had wandered into the room whence Agathe Mitis had fled, after driving the midnight knife into her foe's heart. There was a large trunk still at the window sill. He leaned out. It was but a few strides to the sill of his own window, and the coping was made eighteen inches wide, to thoroughly shade the rooms below, in the terrible sun glare.

"An easy road enough!" he murmured, and then he stooped and picked up a picture lying on the table. It was the fair face of Agathe the Serpent!

"In memoriam," he muttered, as he thrust it in his breast.

"What will you do with this?" said Vinton, pointing to the body.

"Bury him out there, beside Richardson, in the Strangers' Plat," said the burly English doctor. "It's only the payment of a long overdue debt. Some one of Richardson's chums may have 'squared accounts.'"

"Blood pays all debts, at last!" said Vinton.

"This man owes a good deal yet!" the callous surgeon said, as Vinton departed to join the Consul.

"Hasten!" cried Fitzgerald. "Your things are already gone. I want to see Van Lennep. By Jove! I have actually frightened these craven fellows into paying him ten thousand pounds for his injuries. I'll make a claim also for Melloni,—alias 'Maloney of Ours!' 'Komanos and Company' shall give him twenty-five hundred good yellow guineas!"

"I should say the toils were closing around them!" retorted Vinton.

"Wait till Captain Drage only comes. We will all join forces and break up this nest of swindlers at once!" said the angry Consul. "The hand that slew Bouclair cut the last knot which bound these rogues in their secret alliance. It was well done, after all! A short cut to justice. His fate sought him out in the silent night!"

"I will return from the fleet as soon as possible," said the Consul, when he dismissed Howard Vinton's marine guard, to resume their easy duties of parading in lobster-back style.

"Do!" cried Vinton. "We must both of us instantly telegraph to Drage at Constantinople. He should know at once of the whereabouts of the 'Cornaro.'"

"You are right!" said Fitzgerald, as he hailed a passing naval boat, and was rowed away to the fleet.

And as he rode away along the mole, Howard Vinton gazed at the splendid beauty of the woman's face smiling out there upon the painted card. "Just what they have made her,—a desecrated temple of Nature,—the ruin of a woman's life. For, where she lies, she was dragged down by man to be merely the sport and plaything of an idle hour."

It was clear to Vinton that Bouclair had forcibly held the dangerous beauty as a hostage for the good faith of the man he had saved from the horrors of a Turkish prison, only for his own base ends.

"Her secret is her own; she alone is responsible. I have a right to save her life! I have none to take it!"

There was a singular activity in the afternoon operations of the startled Rustem Pasha. He sent out guards to sweep all the streets of all unknown loiterers, and there was an unwonted deference shown to every European venturing abroad.

For, the grinning guns of the foreign vessels looked ominously near as the international fleet slowly swung at anchor. There were a dozen men-o-war's armed boats on the bay on patrol.

The report of Consul Fitzgerald as to the wounded men was most encouraging, and Vinton breathed freely as he knew that the British Embassy at Stamboul would receive in the early evening the full dispatches for the guidance of Captain Drage.

"I shall shunt the whole thing off on him when he comes. There is nothing now left to do but to seize the ship, and it now is only an open fight. With Consul, fleet and Van Lennep's experienced aid, the old boy should easily earn his Chief Inspectorship. As for me, I will gladly give up my Oriental researches and carefully examine the environs of sunny Southsea! For there is something lacking in love carried on by a distant correspondence, I find!"

The young man yearned to fold "The Child" in his arms and to hear her timidly say with that sweetly faltering voice which he loved so well, "I love you,—only you!"

He had deduced this fact from the gradually warming letters, but he desired to "verify his deductions" by a personal interview, "on the spot!"

"I am going now to attend a secret meeting of the consular corps," said Fitzgerald after the close of their evening meal. "There is a great deal of fierce unrest at present in Smyrna and it appears that the fracas at Dragoman's Point has been rumored about. There are about eight hundred respectable foreigners here, and a sudden emeute would sacrifice them. The Pasha is awake at last to his own official danger. He has sent me already the money for Van Lennep in good yellow Turkish pounds. And I have made the recla-

mation for 'Melloni,' the brave. But you must not venture out till my return. You may be sure that the confederates of this dead villain are lurking about town now, revengeful and alert."

"I will settle my little message and write some letters," remarked Vinton, with a slight blush. For the good-humored Consul had easily noted the "regular use of stationery" in the direction of sunny Southsea!

"We are going to take some concerted action as to the foreigners 'without papers' here," gravely said Fitzgerald. "Get up a kind of a business and official blacklist, and in this way, bankers, home merchants and insurance companies will be greatly protected. There must be always some skilled European's business aid for these mongrel Greeks, Turks and Armenians to pull off a good winning. They can't live on each other. If we blacklist all the 'undesirables,' then the Oriental swindlers can only get the aid of some refugee Jew, and, even then, the respectable Israelites of the Orient will chase out, for the Turk has always been strangely tolerant of the inoffensive Jews, probably because they are not armsbearers. And there are very many worthy Israelites here!"

"And they have no Minister or Consul to come down and levy 'lex talionis,'" laughed Vinton. "Perhaps the fact that there is no 'Jewish fleet' may make the Hebrew a 'persona grata' with these Moslems. They don't mind land soldiers, but, the burning of Trebizond, the battles of Navarino and Lepanto even are fresh in their minds. They have a holy horror of these, who go down to the sea in ships."

"You may be right. I never knew a Jewish Tom Bowling!" said Fitzgerald as he grasped his own revolver and called for Foley, armed cap-a-pie, to accompany his cavasse. "I'm off! We will soon send a 'round robin' terrifier into the old Pasha's camp. He's pretty well rattled now,—and we'll keep him going. I want to keep up his 'holy awe' until we have grabbed the 'Alessandro Cornaro.' After that,—I'll let up."

"Yes! Till the next time! I begin to understand

your moral suasion, Fitz," said Vinton, who had composed a neat, a very neat introduction to what he fondly hoped would be "the one letter of his life!" He was interrupted in his "pleasing task" by the delivery of a telegram from the old veteran conducting the stern chase.

It was dated at the British Embassy.

"Bravo!" cried Vinton as he read: "Yours received. Have ordered the 'Conqueror' to pick me up at Scio. I shall cruise off Smyrna, follow the 'Cornaro' in, and seize her. I leave to-morrow and will be with you in a week. Full powers from the Ambassador here. Will send you home soon!"

It was the happiest evening of Vinton's stay at Smyrna, the evening when his secret enemy was consigned to the cypress grove on the hill, below the stern stony Mont Pagus, by the side of the very man whom he had foully done to death.

When the Consul returned, Sergeant Foley had the report that the apartment was already cleared of all which recalled the vanished king of swindlers, Emile Bouclair.

The business of the caravansera was to welcome the coming and speed the parting guest. Emile Bouclair had gone out, alone, upon a long and silent journey, to a land where the branding iron and even the keeper's lash, had no terrors now.

But, his work lived after him, the unfinished task was left for other busy hands to take up! Where a man's good golden coins are, there his heart is apt to linger,—and others beside the Consul, Howard Vinton,—the wounded and resentful Van Lennep,—and, that respectable old veteran of the yellow Dragon flag, "Shun Lee" Drage,—were eagerly watching the modern Odyssey of the "richest cargo of the Levant."

In the spacious halls of Caspari and Company, with all the doors carefully guarded, an assembly of polyglot scoundrels were gathered in the great rooms piled with the costly bales of Persia's caravans.

The air was redolent with spices, the fragrance of

priceless Syrian tobacco, and bales of the unrivaled carpets of the Levant filled the corners. A fortune in opium,—a prince's ransom in Cashmere shawls,—and India veils, was near,—and all the wealth of Ormuz and of Ind was hoarded in the long, low bazaars, closely surrounding the Caspari warehouses.

Grave Turks, chibouque in hand,—eager Armenians,—sly, smooth, velvet-eyed Greeks,—patriarchal bearded Jews and a dozen sullen-eyed officers gleaming in the Sultan's tawdry golden livery listened to the murmurs of the speakers who alternately aroused their hopes and fears. There was one who was the "led captain" of the dead arch-scoundrel. When all had been heard in varying discordant opinions,—this cool renegade European startled his hearers.

"The prudent means taken to handle the perilous venture of the 'Cornaro' are known only to the man we have lost, and to our general agent in London. If Bouclair did not destroy his secret dispatches, then the French Consul has seized them all. We have but one man left to rely on.

"It is Ernest Schnorr! and no other man can save that ship and cargo for us now. He must be telegraphed to come out here at once. Should the vessel arrive, it can be held to await him!

"We are all answerable to the law here. We may be driven out or followed. The enemies whom we have always had will now follow that ship back here. No one knows the plan agreed upon but Schnorr, and he must come here, at once, by Constantinople. He can telegraph from there to Caspari and Company to represent 'Komanos and Company' until his arrival. Once here,—we must then find a way to handle the cargo to our profit. The ship is our own. It is the only safe way."

When the speaker ceased, there was a general shout of applause and he was named at once with the house of Caspari and Company to manage the whole venture.

"We can make all secret arrangements for our next

venture, while our London partner is out here, and so escape trouble, if the authorities will only be true to us."

In a half hour, the great warerooms were deserted, save by the new committee and the Turkish officials who had remained to learn their lesson so as to screen themselves and the frightened Pasha.

It was six o'clock in the evening at far away London when Ernest Schnorr read the fateful dispatch which called him now to fight on even terms, with his stern enemy, Drage, at far away Smyrna for the imperiled hundred thousand pounds.

"It is a Godsend,—a real Godsend, this fellow's death!" mused the startled Schnorr. He read again the long cipher dispatch.

"Murdered—in revenge—some woman quarrel," he reflected. "Bouclair was always a ladies' man. And all his records, papers and dispatches are missing. Then, I am safe—from British law. As for the rest, they guarantee me all my expenses and a handsome bonus!"

He glanced at his watch. "Six o'clock! I can get the Dover boat at midnight!"

And, so calling a boy, he sent for his head clerk. He had secretly arranged for his proposed long visit to Germany. The dingy den in Cadogan's Buildings was only occupied by his famulus. With true Hebraic sagacity he had secretly removed all his own valuable records. There was but a beggarly array of empty boxes for his arch enemy, "Lloyds," to seize upon.

"I will baffle them now!" he grinned, as he set his landlady at work making his pacquets.

"Trade is slack. I'll take a three months' run to Germany," he said. "My clerk will take all my letters. I'll give up my rooms. He will take my traps away to-morrow."

When the clerk arrived, his employer's luggage was already on the four-wheeler at the door.

"Send all letters to me, 'Zum Goldner Adler,'—Wien," he said, handing him three twenty-pound

notes. "There's your salary for three months. All you have to do is to say nothing. I'm going to take a run. Write to me once a week. Take all the stuff away and keep it. I will take a run around Germany."

When Mr. Ernest Schnorr saw Dover light fade away behind him, he grinned. "Now, Mr. Lloyds' Detective, Enos Drage, it's you or I,—for a hundred thousand pounds. I will fool you yet,—and,—with your eyes open."

BOOK III.—A Stern Chase Is a Long One!

CHAPTER XI.

A PHANTOM SHIP AT SMYRNA!—CAPTAIN ENOS DRAGE HEADS THE BOARDERS!—A PERPLEXING PUZZLE!

While the upturned clods gleamed still raw and red over the grave of the murdered French convict, in the Strangers' Plat at Smyrna, and the startled land pirates ran around, still dismayed at the loss of their trusted leader, the "Alessandro Cornaro" was lumbering heavily along toward Cape Matapan at a three-quarter speed.

In the sweltering sun, the far, blue Mediterranean gleamed out a burning sapphire zone, as the cliffs of Valetta faded away from sight. The nondescript crew lounged on deck at their dominoes, while the deeply laden craft crawled slowly along on an even keel. Jack Masterson's place was a mere sinecure now. He had easily glided into the good graces of Dimitri Nicolo and Tomasso Corvini.

In fact, he had often acted as peacemaker between them and the now morose McGregor. There had been quarrel and brawl between the three conspirators all the way from the Bay of Biscay, as far as Malta. For old Sandy's stout heart was shaken at last. He had urged in vain, running the great tramp ashore on the coast of Spain or Portugal.

"You can trust to Bouclair that the insurance has been duly renewed. All that you have to do is to let me disconnect the machinery when we get near enough this rough coast. You can have the boats

then ready to save the whole ship's company, and when she drifts on the rocks she will break up in five minutes. This dead-weight load has ruined her. She creaks like an old wind mill."

But Nicolo was deaf!

"I have my orders. Bouclair has surely found some other way to dispose of this cargo. No! Back to Smyrna we go!"

The Greek's eyes glowed, for every mile brought him nearer to the lustrous-eyed serpent woman, whose love was the sweetly poisoned elixir of life to him now.

"You're a fool!" blurted out McGregor. "These fellows, Schnorr and Bouclair, are both smart devils. We may be hauled out of the ship, treated as pirates, or cast into a Turkish dungeon, while they save themselves. You are missing the chance of the run. There's no devilish white witch yacht playing around our bows like a dolphin now!"

"I will be true to orders," cried Nicolo. "When I get to Smyrna, Bouclair can put another man in the ship if he wishes, but, I'll hang her up all safe in Bournabat Bay!"

Over their cups the delectable pair quarreled all the while, with Corvini ready at hand to second Nicolo with the assassin's knife. But the burly Masterson spread oil upon the troubled waters.

"Nicolo may get secret orders at Malta! The Greek Consul is our friend there. Let us have no quarrels. For this rag-tag and riff-raff we have on board may take a notion to cut all our throats and sack the ship. They are bitterly growling for their back pay now!"

And so, all hands turned to, and played the deck officer. There was a dark cloud on Dimitri Nicolo's brow when the Greek Consul left the ship at Malta. He had only brought to him the imperative orders of Bouclair to hasten back and to make no customs' declaration, even at Smyrna,—leaving all to him. And there was not a single letter from Agathe. Nor even a token!

But the Greek official had sternly said: "There are

earnest reclamations by the agents of Lloyds and the French Consul here as to your strangely, irregular voyage. If you are found off your course, or in any strange trouble between here and Smyrna, you all are likely to hang. I have even been asked to take the officers out of the ship. I have done for my friend Bouclair what I will never do again. I have risked my official position to stand by an old friend."

He whispered a few words in Nicolo's ear that made the pirate turn pale. And, yet, he guarded his silence, for he feared the motley ship's company. So he alone knew the meaning of the dark-hulled English corvette which was following steadily on, and never dropping out of signal glass range. A sullen gloom fell like a pall over the strange quartette!

"If that be not a man o' war, then I'm a lubber," growled old Sandy, as he glowered at the dogging vessel trailing in their wake.

"Pooh! only a British dispatch boat on her way to Athens, to Stamboul, or carrying some minister or official," said Jack Masterson.

"Why! Blow me! The Mediterranean's only a 'British pond' since the days of Horatio Nelson!"

He was not particularly anxious that his three companions should know of the Maltese fruit peddler who had hung on at the Jacob's ladder, waiting patiently for hours, till he delivered his secret letters from Lloyds' agent.

True, Jack knew, too, that old "Shun Lee" would be waiting at Smyrna to welcome them, but the letters which he smuggled to the peddler messenger would have brought him to his dying agonies had the three greedy swindlers known of his secret report. The one letter to Mary Horton was a poor substitute for the vanished hours of dalliance in the cozy "below stairs" of St. Aubrey's Villa.

"I'm earning all I'm likely to get!" mourned Jack. "This is a rum old ship,—an easy one to join,—and the very deuce to get rid of. If I mistake not, there'll be blood spilt among these chaps. It's an unlucky

run. If old 'Shun Lee' has really got us headed off, then, it's all up with 'Komanos and Company!'"

In vain Jack Masterson tried to cheer up the chief engineer.

"We're just running into some beastly cul de sac," he gloomily said. "I wish I'd a cut stick in old England!"

"Never mind, mate!" answered Jack. "We will work home together. There's more ships than one on the sea!"

"That's so! There's one of them! And with mighty handy yard arms!" said McGregor as he watched the British bull dog crawling on ominously behind them. The dogs of war were loose!

Howard Vinton was spared the sensation of the season at Smyrna by the excursion to Scio, which followed the arrival of Captain Drage's dispatch. An official visit of the heaviest steam launch of the British battle ship gave the young American an opportunity to await the hidden pursuer of the "Cornaro" at Kastro.

The tragic death of Bouclair,—the mysterious disappearance of Agent Van Lennep,—the fight at the warehouses at Dragoman's Point,—the abduction of the beautiful Greek dancer,—all these things formed the thrilling contents of the last issue of the Journal de Smyrne. A tail to the journalistic kite was furnished by the reported return of the "Alessandro Cornaro," whose bootless voyage had brought dire ruin down upon scores of Smyrna speculators. The clearance of the returning vessel from Malta, to Smyrna en route for Taganrog, at the mouth of the Don, was a feature of the most improbable tale ever foisted upon the guileless Smyrniotes.

And the very next day, the "Reforma" appeared with a long account of all the romantic happenings of the voyage of the "Apollo," where a rich and distinguished British lord,—traveling incognito,—had fallen a victim to the charms of lovely Agathe, the dancer. There was but one sensation in the hundred cafés and gar-

dens of Smyrna, and the babble as to the strange voyage of the "Alessandro Cornaro" grew into a storm of gossip which roused all men's blood to the fever heat.

If there was aught left behind to betray the secret career of Emile Bouclair, the seals of the French Consulate closely guarded the enigma of the past life of the dead adventurer.

But the nightly sessions of the forty thieves in the warehouses of Caspari and Company told of a ceaseless activity, and the greedy Turkish officials of Smyrna swarmed around Customs House and Pasha's Palace with an unusual activity, fear lending new life to their leaden heels. Consul Fitzgerald, closeted with the French official, was a very Sphinx of speechless obduracy, while the tide of gossip rose higher and higher around them. It was a grand old time of storm and stress.

Upon the breezy portico of the British Consul's house at Kastro, in Scio, Captain Enos Drage sat, fanning himself with his sun helmet, as he listened to Howard Vinton's story of his life at Smyrna. The old veteran mopped his conical head with his red bandanna and grimly took in the strange story.

Then he recounted himself, the adventurous career of the will o' the wisp, and the mysterious occurrences in London. "I begin to see, my boy," said "Shun Lee," "that the men whom we have been fighting are the ablest foes whom I have ever tackled! There is but one thing for you to do. The moment that the 'Conqueror' pokes her nose around the castle, then you and your party had better start back at once to Smyrna! All that you have to do is to get back under Fitzgerald's roof and stay there! You must be content to cut me dead in public, at Smyrna, for I shall openly attack these fellows when the boat arrives, and I may need you to go to Constantinople for me. I will find out who is behind this run now, for my orders are to follow the 'Cornaro' to Nova

Zembla! And you must be safe—in every hair of your head!"

"And my part of the work is now pretty nearly done?" hazarded Vinton, for he yearned to sniff the fresh breezes on the Solent. They had not approached the delicate question of the home relations. Suddenly old "Shun Lee" jumped up. "By Jove! What a brute I am! I forgot," and he raced into his room and produced Lily Arnot's packet. "There is something which 'The Child' sent to you!" he said, with a kindling eye. "Howard, my boy!" the old veteran cried, "I owe my chief inspectorship to you! They voted me in the very day I started, and old John Higginbotham has personally guaranteed the twenty-five thousand pounds reward for this season's work!

"Now, you can afford to wait in patience! I shall give that money to Lily Arnot for her wedding present, and when we have polished off 'Komanos and Company' I will go home and give you the very sweetest bride who ever wore orange blossoms!" The two men clasped hands in a silent tenderness.

"Why, you young dog!" laughed Enos, "Lily actually boasted to me that she alone sent you out here on this trip! I thought that you were only my agent, but you have richly earned your reward! We will go home together, and you shall have your wedding cruise in the 'Conqueror!'"

The indulgence in these rosy dreams was cut short by the vision of a white beauty gliding around the tranquil waters at the foot of Kastro Castle. "There she blows!" gayly cried "Shun Lee." "You had better send your man down to the club and have the launch made ready! For to-morrow night, I'll be guarding Smyrna Bay! I will meet you on the 'Conqueror' and give your officer escort my dispatches to the fleet captain. By Jove! I forgot, too, dear old Lavinia's offerings! She quite regards you as one of the family!"

He returned with three portentous-looking books. "There you are! 'Manual for British Travelers in

the Orient,'—'The Life and Conversion of Colonel Gardiner,'—'Havelock, the Christian Soldier!' With these three little lamps to your feet, you cannot go astray in this world or the next! She's a rare old girl, is Lavinia!"

The overjoyed Vinton hastened to the quay, where the "Euryanthe's" launch was all ready to steam out of the harbor. On his way he examined the packet which "The Child" had thoughtfully sent.

The "stationery" seemed to match his happy frame of mind, and he found the far-off lanes of sunny South-sea strangely near as he hastily read the words which set his lover's heart aflame. There was a picture—a new picture, too—of a sweetly love-chastened face! As they waited for the appearance of Captain Drage to run alongside the "Conqueror" for the veteran's dispatches, a familiar steamer swept grandly in from the blue Archipelago.

"There's a better chance for you to return to Smyrna," said the lieutenant in charge. "The 'Apollo' will beat us in! She only halts here for half an hour to land passengers!"

Then, a sudden longing seized upon the American to learn the last tidings of the woman who had fled out of the Chamber of Death, the woman whose trembling hand had left the stains of blood upon his palm at parting. "Run me out to her, Walsingham! I want to speak to the captain. We can come back and board the 'Conqueror' then!"

As they sped along, Vinton wondered if Captain Beberovich was aware of Bouclair's death. "They may surprise even him, these cowardly Turks, on his return! Shall I tell him?"

He was undecided as he sprang upon the deck. And then he reflected how he had previously concealed his knowledge of French and German. "This man may be of them!" he muttered. "I will trust to the captain's sagacity!" Vinton lightly ran up the stairs and faced the captain upon his quarter deck.

There was a startled look of grave surprise, but the bronzed sailor led the way to his cabin.

There, closing the door with care, he opened his vest and drew out a letter. Then, laying his finger upon his lips, he offered the visitor his nautical hospitality.

Vinton drained a glass of wine, and quickly understood the significance of Beberovich's hint, as he again laid his finger upon his lips and drew his hand across his throat! He pointed to the launch and extended his brown palm.

The American "stood not upon the order of his going," but descending the ladder, steamed away to the "Conqueror." On the way, he opened the sealed note. It told him of the safety of the woman to whom he owed his secret victory over "Komanos and Company."

And his heart beat tumultuously as he read the brief lines:

"I am safe now! You risked your life to save mine! You might have been accused of that brute's death! I will show you that even the wild Agathe can be grateful. The captain of the 'Apollo' knows all! He will tell Nicolo where I am! I trust to you, as you trusted to me! If you ever come to Stamboul, you can find me at the Café Gréco—in Galata—with Christakis Nicolo, Dimitri's brother, and you are safe there against any foes!

"Beware of the man August Herrmann, who is a passenger on the 'Apollo!' He is the London partner of 'Komanos and Company,' and his true name is Ernest Schnorr! It is he who telegraphed to Bouclair to finish off Van Lennep!

"So, shun the future chase of the 'Alessandro Cornaro!' There is death waiting to strike, and all the Turkish officials are leagued with these men! If you would save my life, burn this! When Dimitri returns he will desert them, when it is safe! For his enemies have vowed his death! Some one has betrayed them! I must save my Dimitri's life! Farewell! Remem-

ber how I would pay my debt! Leave Smyrna and come over to Stamboul! Here we will both watch over you! It is an accursed place—Smyrna—and the quarrel is not yours!"

There were three faded red rose leaves in the letter—again the sign of "Death!" The letter was folded on his heart, in a safe hiding place. When Vinton leaped upon the deck of the "Conqueror" he drew Enos Drage aside. In excited whispers he told him the whole story of the secret coming of Schnorr.

"Ah! My boy! You are a genius!" said Drage. "Thank God that this fellow Schnorr does not know the 'Conqueror!' Now, remember, this is my last command: For my sake—for Lily Arnot's sake—do not leave the Consulate till I meet you there! Have Consul Fitzgerald shadow this scoundrel Schnorr night and day!"

In ten minutes the "Conqueror" had steamed around the beautiful Kastro point, with the naval launch lashed at her side. Down in the cabin the jovial naval fellows gayly "spliced the main brace," while stern old Enos Drage wrote two last letters to the fleet captain and Consul Fitzgerald. "We have this fellow now, if he dares even to raise a finger! It is a fight to the death! I see it all! They have cabled to this fellow to change ends on the drag rope!"

And, for once in his life, old Enos showed a sentimental weakness. "For Lily's sake—for mine—obey my loving orders! Your bright castaway has just given the enemy over to our hands! Poor, tortured woman! She would save her handsome Greek lover! Where is the woman who would not go through the fires of Hades to save the man she loves?"

And then the lines were cast off. The sturdy launch of the "Euryanthe" raced east to the mouth of Smyrna Bay, while the graceful "Conqueror" sped off southward like a gliding swan driving along to throw her silver shadows in defiance athwart the bows of the huge four-master crawling back to the guarded nest

of "Komanos and Company," encircled by the hills of fair Smyrna Bay.

The steam launch of the "Euryanthe" had a full two hours' advantage of the "Apollo" in the race for the landing at Smyrna.

Howard Vinton urged the lieutenant in command to test the full speed of his launch. "The dispatches we have for the fleet captain and Consul are of vital moment," he said, as the sturdy British engineer threw the link wide open and the launch shot along like an arrow.

"We are dead safe to beat the 'Apollo!'" said the officer. "She has to avoid the shoals and islands." The silver hull of the "Conqueror" was gleaming out far to the southward in the little strait between Scio and the mainland as the launch passed the western headlands of the Gulf of Smyrna.

"There is no chance for Enos Drage to miss the great 'Alessandro Cornaro' in that channel, whether by night or day! Thank heavens, he is out of sight now!" mused Vinton, as the smoke of the "Apollo" darkened the western horizon. Before sunset, the excited young American had leaped ashore at the mole in front of the Consul's house. "Now, Walsingham! Your dispatches to the flag ship, once delivered, and then we are all ready for this ocean Robert Macaire!"

"Ah!" growled Fitzgerald. "Now the plot thickens! So, we are to fight it out here in the open! You can amuse yourself with the journals while I give a couple of trusty men my orders. I will have my consular boat ready and be the first to hook on the 'Apollo,' and so I will be able to read the whole riddle to-night! If this August Herrmann goes to the Hotel Huck, we have only a smart schemer to battle with!

"If the Turks take him openly to their own bosom, then, our main battle will be with the old Pasha! For, corrupt as these fellows are, they are deucedly sagacious! I am very curious to see how the Moslems will work to cover up their villainy! From what you tell me of Enos Drage, the old boy will probably make

a dash on the four-master and capture her as neatly as he did those Chinamen on Great Saddle Island! I am glad of it—for if the naval authorities back him up, it will save me a great pow-wow with these oily Turks!"

Fitzgerald's trap was set long before the "Apollo," gleaming with its lights, dropped anchor off the long mole.

"I will have all who gather about him noted," said the Consul. "All that we have to do now is to keep quiet! Now, what can I do for you, my boy?" said the host as they sat down to dinner. "I wish you to send for the editors of La Reforma and the Journal de Smyrne, as also the manager of the Hotel Huck! I do not care to see these fellows, but you can give them a good sound frightening, and make them retract all the lies published about me in their journals!

"It is vital to Captain Drage and his secret backers that I should in no way be connected with this intrigue from first to last! And, my steps may be dogged by these revengeful rascals!

"Of all men, I do not care to have Mr. Ernest Schnorr suspect me to be the agent of our implacable thief-catcher, Drage!" And that very evening, the semi-weekly journals going to press inserted the most abject denials of "the slanders which had crept into their paper," upon the authoritative denial of H. B. M. Consul. But three columns were given up to the wild vagaries of gossip as to the return of the "Alessandro Cornaro," which slow freighter had been passed two days out by the quick Austrian Lloyds steamer touching at Athens.

It was late in the night before Fitzgerald's emissaries returned. Howard Vinton watched the Consul as he listened with a grave solicitude to their disclosures.

And then, he gave them all his orders for their future guidance. "It passes all understanding how these fellows are honeycombed with the foulest official corruption!" said Fitzgerald. "My men were hooked

onto the ladder when the official boarding party reached the 'Apollo.'

"The head manager of Caspari and Company, with the Pasha's first aide de camp, went on board, and before a single passenger was allowed to leave they departed with Mr. August Herrmann and his luggage. He was taken off even before the official mails! My own boat followed in quest of my consular mail bags, and my spies noted a conference of a half hour with the whole assembled chief officers of the customs in the Douane, and after that this common merchant, August Herrmann, a burly, ordinary-looking German Hebrew, was taken in state to the Pasha's palace, riding in one of the Governor's own carriages!

"It looks very dark! It looks as if force against fraud would be the only efficient final remedy! And, whatever these scoundrels mean to do, they will have abundant time to hatch it up before we can begin effective proceedings. The game is now in their own hands, and we can not yet communicate with Drage!

"There might be time to prepare some suitable papers if he were here, and to seize the ship and have her sent up with sealed hatches to Constantinople. There, with the influence of the English ambassador, the cargo could be examined. If irregular, it would be duly forfeited, and, as the ship belongs to the same owners, the vessel would follow the cargo!"

"Well, my friend, the play will play itself out soon enough!" said Vinton; "and I shall follow 'Shun Lee's' advice and lie low here, until he has made his coup! From his dispatches to the Fleet captain, I think that the old mariner is 'loaded for bear'!"

There was a general excitement upon the busy streets of Smyrna in the afternoon of the next day which followed the appearance of the two journals, and the rumor spread from mouth to mouth that the "Alessandro Cornaro" was sighted far out beyond the outer fort.

Howard Vinton had but in one respect violated the prudential orders of his soon-to-be relative. For he

made a visit in the Consular boat to the "Apollo," and then handed, without a word, a letter to the genial Captain Beberovich. The sailor laughed, carefully placed his finger on his lips, and then hid the letter in the inner waistcoat pocket which had sheltered Agathe Mitis' note.

It had cost Howard Vinton an hour of careful reflection, this brief letter. "Dare I trust to this wild waif of fortune? And yet, she has trusted all to me!" he mused, and then he wrote to Agathe: "We shall surely meet again! I am coming to Constantinople to see you! I will repay your kindness! If there is trouble and the ship is seized, I have some influence with the Consul. I will help to save Dimitri Nicolo for your sake! And so, remember that I would be as true to you as you have been to me. All is quiet in Smyrna. There is nothing said as to the strange affair at the Hotel Huck.

"The French Consul has sealed up all the effects and papers of the man Bouclair, and all of your effects have been delivered to the Greek Consul. If I come to Stamboul, I will come on the 'Apollo,' as Captain Beberovich will have special orders to protect me in every way. So, I shall surely see you again! Trust always to me!" He had sealed the note with his crest, which, displayed upon an old family ring, had largely augmented the popular delusion that he was a nobleman incognito.

There was an undue activity in the beautiful harbor as the Consular barge left the side of the "Apollo." A dozen boats were darting out into the middle thread of the channel in an eager race. Out on the broad bay, a couple of tugs were now each puffing away toward the Bournabat anchorage, towing a rusty old bark, and both these large-sized, dilapidated old sailing vessels flew ostentatiously the red field and crescent Turkish flag.

There was a line of coal barges slowly stemming the current toward the head of the bay, and several lit-

tle puffing midget tugs were drawing after them lines of freight tows linked together.

"I wonder what is up!" cried Vinton to the helmsman. "There's the cause of all the racket, sir! See the crowds gathering on the mole!" The young man then turned his eyes to the setting sun and beheld the huge "Alessandro Cornaro" midway between the outer fort and the mole, moving steadily along with the brilliant Greek flag flying in her mizzen rigging as a pilot's signal.

And, steaming daintily abreast of her, the English colors saucily flying at her spanker, and with the burgee of the Royal Yacht Club waving at her main truck, the "Conqueror" glided along as daintily as a silver swan!

"Ha! They are already signaling the flag ship!" cried the helmsman. "There is something up! See the answering signals! There is going to be some fun now! Look—just look—at the Turkish patrol boats!" Vinton glanced at the mole and saw three steam launches leaving the Douane, one of them closely packed with musket-bearing soldiers.

The official flag drooped proudly over each, and away they sped along over the glassy waves toward the head of the bay. "You are right, coxswain!" muttered Vinton. "They are lowering a couple of armed boats from the 'Euryanthe!' See the 'Conqueror' spurt now!" With black smoke pouring from her funnels, the beautiful yacht raced along, leaving the dingy, lead-colored freighter as if anchored!

As the "Conqueror" neared the "Euryanthe," there was a boat seen towing at her companionway And Howard Vinton uttered an excited exclamation as the boat dropped off and then shot out directly toward the British flag ship.

Every nerve in the young man's body was tingling, but he sadly said: "Put me ashore at the Consulate, at once! Mr. Fitzgerald may need to use his barge!" In ten minutes, the young man was seated on the bal-

cony of the Consulate, signal glass in hand, and the consular barge was pulling off to the "Euryanthe."

For, at the strand, the chief clerk anxiously waiting, directed the boat to report to his chief, now on board the war vessel. "There will be some rare old fun now!" said the chief clerk, as, binoculars at his eyes, he watched the moving scene upon the bay.

"It seems as if there's a race for the old sea tramp!" The "Cornaro" was now pouring out the densest black clouds of smoke, and the two boats from the "Euryanthe" were pulling smartly directly for the upper anchorage at Bournabat. The silver-sided "Conqueror" raced along abreast of the "Cornaro," which bore at her truck the black circle and K, on the defiant white flag floating from her mizzen.

"I would give my three months' 'leave of absence' to be on that 'Euryanthe' cutter!" the clerk excitedly cried. "See the whole mole! It is black with people, and they are gathering on the housetops! There'll be a fight for the boat, I'm afraid!"

Vinton groaned in his inactivity. "It is British oil of ash now against the Turkish steam launches! But the tramp is as high as a house wall! Nobody can clamber on board of her! The thieves on board will only help the Turks!" he mournfully said.

"Where will she anchor?" demanded Vinton, with a growing excitement. "The tramp seems to be steering straight for those two barks that are anchored now up there by those barges! She can't go very far, for she draws twenty-seven feet, and her nose will soon be in the mud!

"It's a pretty race, by Jove! a pretty race! See! The 'Conqueror' is signaling the flag ship all the while!" The white yacht ran ahead of the huge freighter and rounded the line of now anchored barges clustering around the two great barks, riding high and empty, their dingy copper gleaming green in the glowing sunset.

"Ha! There goes her anchor!" almost yelled the clerk. "I wonder why the Greek Consul is not out to

join in this race for the big ship! She is flying the Greek flag! He would seem to be a party to this comedy, or tragedy, as the wind-up may show it!"

"I can't make it out!" mournfully answered Howard Vinton. "It looks as if it was a case of Greek and Greek! I'm afraid the Pasha has got a finger in this pie!" "Hello!" the clerk shouted. "By heavens! The crew are tumbling off on this side; the English and Turkish boats have swept around to the port quarter! See, the skiffs from the barges are taking off all the crew! They swarm out like rats! Now, what the deuce is up! They must be fighting there on board!"

"They are hauling down the Greek flag! See! See!" was Howard Vinton's excited rejoinder. The great tramp began blowing off steam and great feathery white flakes of mist veiled her for a moment. It was when a puff of breeze blew these mists away that the two young men gasped in concert: "There is a new flag going up! It's the Union Jack!" proudly cried the Consular clerk, and then, with a sickening heart, Howard Vinton tossed his glasses away. "By Jove! We are outgeneraled! It is the Turkish Crescent! The port authorities have claimed the ship!"

"You are right!" replied the disgusted young official. "I wish to Heavens that the 'Euryanthe' would only open a broadside and blow the whole ruck and truck right out of the water! If our people had only kept the steam launch ready. But, it's too late, the job's done!"

When Howard Vinton went sadly into the bungalow to await the return of the boarders, the sunny lanes of Southsea seemed to be twice as far off as before. "I am afraid that my poor old friend has made a mess of it—after all! It looks as if the course of true love was roughening up a bit! This fiasco may tie me here for months! For the Turk, when he gets braced for a long palaver, cross-legged on his divan, chibouque and coffee in hand, is a regular out and outer! I wonder if that beggar Schnorr is now aboard that craft?"

And he disconsolately awaited the return of Enos

Drage's boarding party. He had little hope, for there the red flag, with its white crescent, showed to the yelling multitudes on the mole who had won, and the hoarse cries of the delighted Moslem mob echoed far on the sultry air.

It had been with a bounding heart that Enos Drage drew up at the Jacob's ladder of the "Alessandro Cornaro." When the great freighter came at last to anchor, the two British cutters were on the starboard quarter and the leading Turkish steam launch stealing up on the port side. There were meaning fluttering signals frantically waved from the Moslem boat, and the companionway was soon loosely rattling down to admit the friendly detachment whose heads shone out gleaming with the red fez of Islam.

But, the eager old "Shun Lee" stole around in the shadow of the stern, and his foot was the very first on the platform, when the yelling Turks sheered off, fearing to crush the first cutter of H. M. S. "Euryanthe." But shrill warning yells now arose, and when the officer, followed by his marines, reached the deck, Captain Enos Drage was speechless with rage!

The anchor had been down ten minutes, and the roaring sound of the escaping steam was the only sign of life on the "Cornaro's" deck. Speechless with rage, the old English sailor rushed to the starboard rail. The last stoker of the "Cornaro" had just dropped down the anchor chain, and a grinning crowd, gathered on the deck of a low barge alongside, taunted the old man in the white pith sun helmet.

He shook his green-lined umbrella at the escaped recalcitrants, and then, dashed to the foksal hatch. Locked! Then he ran aft! Every door was locked with the padlocks which he had noted at Gravesend. If a soul remained to draw the fires, they were cunningly hidden below. The officer of marines touched his arm. "Beg pardon, captain. These other people have just climbed on board and have formed up aft!"

"Fall in your men, then! Leave all to me!" said Captain Drage, as he walked swiftly back to where Con-

sul Fitzgerald was standing with his dragoman in silence.

"Who is the head man of this party?" demanded Drage, whose face had whitened with the ashen rage of old age. "The chief aid of the Pasha," said Fitzgerald, stiffly saluting. "The Kaimaikan in charge of customs, and he," whispered the Consul, "this fellow over there, is August Herrmann—that is, your enemy, Ernest Schnorr! Beware! He is a London Englishman, you know!"

While Drage was speaking, two brawny Turks were hauling down the Greek flag before the astonished eyes of the British party. "Will you tell him that I board this ship by the authority of the ranking British naval officer to seize the ship 'Alessandro Cornaro' for barratry and illegal voyage? She has cleared from Malta for Taganrog, and, her voyage is a practical piracy!"

The old man glowered at Ernest Schnorr, who was regarding him with an amused smile. The chief of customs and the Pasha's aid gravely answered the dragoman, while Schnorr drew near to the group. "He says, Captain, that the vessel has only called here 'for orders,' and in pursuance of the directions of the owner of the ship and cargo! The Greek Consul has been duly and properly notified of all. And our only recourse is to the British ambassador at Constantinople now. You would not ask the officer to use force now, to maintain your possession!"

Enos Drage glanced at the opposing lines of soldiery. There were none of the responsible officers, not even a sailor of the crew, present. He moved as if in a dream, for, before his eyes, the Turkish flag went slowly up to the mizzen peak, and Ernest Schnorr grinned in an insolent triumph. "What does this tomfoolery mean?" angrily cried Drage, breaking out into vociferous English.

"It means," said Ernest Schnorr, now advancing boldly, "that I have duly and legally transferred this ship to the Turkish flag, and placed it, with sealed

hatches, under the protection of the Pasha of Smyrna! The papers were all legally executed yesterday, and I am here with the highest port officers to see the Turkish flag officially raised over ship and cargo! There it is! Touch it, if you dare!"

"And, by what right do you do this?" roared Enos Drage. "I own this ship, every plate and plank! I am the ship's husband! I own every ounce of its cargo! I am—'Komanos and Company'!" the burly stranger said, turning away with a sneer.

"Mr. Consul," said the entrapped veteran, "I demand a written statement of these occurrences. I shall make my protest before you to-morrow and ask for warrants for the arrest of the officers and a holding of the crew as witnesses!"

Fitzgerald bowed in silence, and then, Ernest Schnorr faced his secret enemy deliberately. "Who the dickens are you, anyway? If you have claims against the ship or cargo, make them on shore before the courts, the port authorities, or even your own Consul! As for the crew, they are all discharged and free when the anchor drops. Now, I will ask the Honorable British Consul to withdraw all unauthorized persons from this ship, which I now place in the custody of the port officer, the Kaimaikan!"

The Turkish officials politely drew the perplexed British Consul aside, and in a few moments the platoon of marines, with their officers, slowly filed down the gangway and the boats pulled slowly back to the "Euryanthe!" It was in the Pasha's own barge that Consul Fitzgerald and the defeated Enos Drage reached the side of the "Conqueror," now anchored only a dozen cable lengths from her victorious enemy —the "Cornaro!"

Mr. Ernest Schnorr, with an elaborate courtesy, escorted the Consul to the side of his newly-baptized vessel, and then insolently laughed, "Good-bye, Mr. Detective!" as the old sailor descended the ladder. "Shun Lee" Drage shook his fist at the Turkish flag when he stood once more upon British oak. "By the

Gods of War! I will have that rag down!" he raged. But, in the long council of war that night, at the Consulate, neither the Fleet captain, the Consul, nor Vinton saw the way out. "'Komanos and Company' are slippery customers!" said the naval commander. "I am afraid if this transfer holds, that the prey has slipped through your fingers!"

CHAPTER XII.

MANAGER SCHNORR'S SCHEME!—THE RICHEST CARGO TRANSHIPPED FOR TRIESTE!—THE FLOATING BOTTLE!—THE RUN TO TAGANROG!

The dramatic incidents of the reappearance of the phantom steamer "Alessandro Cornaro" heightened the rising storm of popular excitement at Smyrna created by the violent death of Emile Bouclair. The delighted members of the victorious Turkish marine detachment were pleased to relate to all believers of Mahomet the discomfiture of the lobster backed guard of Feringhees.

Smyrna woke to a day of the wildest commercial rumors. It was undoubted that the great freighter had come back to stay for a time, for her fires were now all out, and there was no evidence of her flitting. On the contrary, from the shore the curious bazaar loungers could now observe men swarming all over her decks like rats.

An unwonted activity of the port officials proved also that big events were in the womb of Time. Curious crowds lingered on the long mole watching the grimy, sea-battered ship at whose mizzen the circle with the black K, still shone out in defiance of the vainly exerted secret power of Lloyds. But the blood-red flag of Turkey drooped lazily far above all at the mizzen peak, and it told all the watchers that the Sul-

tan's power sternly defied any private attempt upon the control of the famous steamship.

In the bazaars, at the English club, in the free Tabak parliament of the Hotel Huck, at the shipping offices, and among the gossiping bankers, there was now but one question—"What next?" The cavasses of the English and French Consuls were seen driving pompously around Smyrna and gathering up a convocation of the most reputable foreigners of mercantile weight, called to a formal conference at the British Consulate. The timid Smyrniotes eyed askance the three formidable English vessels of war, and as the day wore on boats filled with uniformed officers were seen swiftly moving to the stronghold where Captain Enos Drage was now legally entrenched. It needed but one excitable partisan to precipitate a mob or create a race war in Smyrna!

For all men knew that the frightened Pasha had convened his extraordinary council, and that all the officers of the mixed tribunal had been summoned to lend the gravity of their official presence.

Sergeant Foley, who had been sent out like the dove from the ark, returned to Consul Fitzgerald with a verbatim copy of the following official notice, posted conspicuously upon all the corners of the European portion of the city, and on the bulletin boards of all the shipping agencies. The words indicated the renewed open defiance of "Komanos and Company" to the banded enemies of their mysterious house.

The hard-headed old veteran, Drage, was now secretly ready for business. He had securely anchored his own yacht under the guns of the English war vessels, and had transferred Manager Van Lennep and the convalescent dragoman Melloni, to the superb accommodations of the "Conqueror."

"'Maloney of Ours' is a treasure to me!" said the despondent "Shun Lee." "I, at least, will have a faithful interpreter and an experienced friend!" There had been a long morning conference on the "Conqueror" between Van Lennep, Drage and the lawyers of the French and English Consulates.

When the Chief Inspector of Lloyds proceeded to the British Consulate for the serious conference of the afternoon, he had prepared a telegraphic resume of the perplexing deadlock, and when duly countersigned by Fitzgerald, it was forthwith telegraphed to the British Ambassador at Stamboul.

Then, Enos Drage turned to the consideration of Ernest Schnorr's défi! "It looks as if this fellow were prepared to openly face all the consequences!" said Fitzgerald. "His language is certainly plain enough!" The official bulletin read:

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN!

"All claims against the vessel, cargo or crew of the Turkish steamship 'Alessandro Cornaro,' from Malta for Taganrog, Russia, will be settled by the undersigned at the office of Caspari and Co. For freight, shipping orders and passage, apply as above. All persons whatever are strictly forbidden boarding the above vessel, now in the hands of the Osmanli customs officers, without an official pass duly countersigned by the undersigned owners.

"KOMANOS AND COMPANY
"By, Ernest Schnorr, Manager."

"He has never dared to issue this warning but by the express consent of the Pasha Governor!" said Consul Fitzgerald, gloomily. "And you see the craftiness of this fellow Schnorr! He has undoubtedly legal authority to represent these shadowy bandits, 'Komanos and Company!'

"He has turned the ship over to the Turkish authorities and he offers a prompt settlement of all claims. This is to keep out of the jurisdiction of the Mixed Tribunal. He will of course refer any question of insurance, cargo or bottomry to the Pasha's council. I don't see how you can legally get at him, Captain Drage!

"Van Lennep, you tell me, has no positive evidence

against these men. The English insurance policies on the cargo have all expired. They will be far too smart to attempt to renew with any Lloyds companies! The ship itself we have no claims against. Unless the British Minister at Constantinople will authorize a positive demand for the examination of the cargo here they are free to hang the old freighter up here indefinitely and to weary us all out!

"As for the Turkish firman, they can get a firman to do anything—for money! If you had a bill of lading for five barrels of oil, for twenty boxes of raisins, for even five boxes of opium, then—we could make a demand, backed by the fleet, for an immediate delivery in kind. We could then make them unload the whole ship to find our own little consignment, and in handling the cargo, easily find out if its body is false and spurious!

"Then your own claims of past insurance frauds would at once attach to both ship and goods! But this fellow who came here under an assumed name, has undoubtedly brought back every bill of lading, properly endorsed to his own order, and was hurrying back here to aid his secret partner, Bouclair, when the midnight murder occurred. It looks as if the whole line was closed up dead solid against any attack!"

Enos Drage gnashed his teeth in a useless rage. "Ah! Sassoon! Sassoon! One day more and I would have had all those hatches opened!" he groaned. "But the signal mistake was mine—not to have bought Isaac Meyer's bills of lading at any price!"

Poor old "Shun Lee!" He saw that the adroit London Jew had only used the visit to the ship at Gravesend as a lever to force the frightened robber syndicate into buying the papers at an enormous advance! It was, after all, John Higginbotham who had greatly undervalued the watchful enemy, and also underrated the "staying power" of "Komanos and Company!"

"We must wait to see if our friend can lend us any wisdom or experience," doubtfully said the Con-

sul. "And I must urge you not to connect young Vinton with your operations here!" earnestly said the Consul.

"Let him sail around, visit the bazaars, show himself in theaters and cafes, and ignore you and your proceedings entirely. He might run over to Athens or up to Stamboul, for I suppose you will watch over this fly-away yourself now till she really ends her voyage!"

"You are right, Consul," said the veteran. "I'll stick to this ship till she unloads, or I'll run after her to Nova Zembla! In a few days, Schnorr must show his hand! Either he will unload here or else go on to Taganrog, and—the mystery will be unveiled at last!"

Drage left the Consul to receive his assembling official guests and then sought out the fair upper chamber where Howard Vinton was seated sullenly gazing at the great ship, lying motionless on the blue bay. The young man's signal glasses were glued upon the defiant flag of the hated vessel. "It's a strange thing, the very strangest thing I ever saw!" cried Vinton. "They have warped one of the sailing vessels alongside the 'Cornaro,' there are fifty men scattered around, and they are now working the three donkey engines at all the hatches! It looks as if they were putting cargo on the 'Cornaro' from the barges, and then loading the bark alongside from the ship!"

Enos Drage grasped the glasses and studied a long while. "You are right! It passes all understanding! I'm afraid, my boy, that we are dished—or, rather, I am! These crafty fellows have run right back into a nest of their friends, and it seems as if they can officially do what they want to here. I shall formally protest to the Consul and get all the records straight. I will probably make formal demand also upon the Pasha for the examination of the officers on oath and for the detention of the crew.

"But, we must now adjust our private relations! You have Sergeant Foley and your two men to aid you! From this moment you and I must be absolute strang-

ers in Smyrna as regards each other! Get out on the bay in the 'Eros.' Cruise around and find out what you can. Run in as near the 'Cornaro' as you dare and examine her well, as well as the barks and the barges! I shall hear to-night from the Ambassador!

"I shall open out on the Pasha to-morrow, aided by the Consul, and, at least, I can follow this ship to her final destination! We can make them produce the bills of lading and the policies of marine insurance, and we will later blacklist everyone of the insurers forever in all of Lloyds companies!

"When I have forced out the evidence of the officers and the crew, I may catch the sly thieves napping! But if I am to get at this secret, you, my boy, are my only hope!

"It's only fair to you to say that you are now free to go back to Southsea to-morrow, if you care to start!" And the dejected old mariner sadly leaned his head upon his hands. "They have conquered, but with the vessel just one half day in my hands, I would have broken those hatches, and if I could get a dozen cases of the false cargo—then the ship and its bogus cargo would be mine!

"Punishment could be demanded by the Consul, backed by the Ambassador at Stamboul and the fleet! But, those seals on the steamer's hatches are protected by the law merchant which rules all the intercourse of the world!"

Howard Vinton sprang to the old man's side. "I will never leave you—not till we go home together in victory, with these fellows smartly punished! Remember that I'm a Yankee, and it was a Yankee captain who cried with his dying voice: 'Don't give up the ship!' I stand to-day by the ringing words of James Lawrence! Count on me through thick and thin! Remember! I'm not working for money!"

The two men grasped hands in a renewed compact. "I'll have a run out to her and bring you the news as soon as I can," said Vinton. "Bravo! My boy! I will see that you get your reward; Now, remember—

only Consul Fitzgerald is to be our means of communication. You are even to ignore Van Lennep!"

In ten minutes, the loosened sail of the "Eros" gleamed far out on the bosom of Smyrna Bay.

The long, weary afternoon wore away and the Consul summed up at last the united wisdom of the officials, naval men, merchants and trusted residents of Smyrna.

Captain Enos Drage had made up his full open statement of the suspicions attaching to the runaway vessel and its doubtful cargo. When all had been dismissed save the French Consul and the commander of the war vessels, then Drage learned that there was not the slightest official irregularity in the actions of the vessel at Cherbourg.

The Greek Consul also reluctantly admitted the entire validity of the transfer of the "Alessandro Cornaro" to the Turkish flag, and he astounded Captain Drage with the information that the entire ship's company would be paid off and dismissed at Smyrna, the "Alessandro Cornaro" proposing to take off with her a Moslem crew in toto, from captain to cabin boy!

"Caspari and Company, a very respectable Greek house here, have offered to guarantee all claims against the vessel and its cargo to me! As the crew is paid off, and will probably separate, I have no power to interfere with Mr. Ernest Schnorr, who is now under Turkish protection!"

"It is strange!" mused the French Consul; "the very same house has guaranteed to settle any claims against the estate of the late so-called 'Bouclair,' and, as I have no official complaints from any reputable French citizens, I see no recourse for you but an open demand upon the Pasha for an embargo—an examination of the cargo, and for the detention of the crew! You failed at home in England—what can you expect here?"

With a shrug of his shoulders, the cynical Frenchman was gone, his Greek confrére laughingly bearing him company. Then Fitzgerald's brow grew

black. "The Commander, you and I, will to-morrow make the demand of Rustem Pasha! If the Ambassador keeps in line with us we may succeed. At any rate you shall see a Turkish trial, pro forma, and then, later, you can be in at the death. I'll see that you give them a good rattling chase."

The Consul's words brought but cold comfort to the stern heart of the old mariner. Enos Drage saw himself defeated in the main object of his stern chase voyage.

For the ship and cargo had both slipped through his fingers, and the Turkish flag floated there in triumph before his eyes, guarding the evidence which he so earnestly sought. There was an international complication now arising to still further embarrass his projected operations. "These Turks will cling together like a mass of putty and now try to hide every weak joint in the enemy's armor," the old man growled in impotent rage, as he saw the clustering barges and flotilla of boats hovering around the two great sailing barks, and the giant tramp.

"There goes the gallant boy Vinton. If he could only open a secret communication with Jack Masterson! Then I might read the riddle! Yet one imprudent signal would bring on Masterson's instant butchery. If the Ambassador would only officially interfere!"

And, as the day wore away, Captain Drage drew only the feeblest comfort from the advice of the lawyer of the Consulate. He listened with a sickening heart to the stories of the absolute inertness and rottenness of the Pasha's past regime.

"If you could quickly bring an action before the Mixed Court," said the lawyer, "we could aid you, but the delay, the callous stupidity, and the ferocious bigotry of the Turks, as well as their patent dishonesty, places you at the mercy of these banded swindlers."

The old mariner groaned in despair when a telegram from the British Ambassador informed him that

he must seek his legal recourse only from the governing Pasha, and, as a last resort, appeal, if defeated, for a final review at Constantinople. "It is true. We are powerless," mused Drage, as he read the last lines.

"No British property is involved, no British subjects are under duress, and there is no warrant as yet for the active interference of naval commander." And, on the portico of the Consulate old Shun Lee dejectedly watched the lateen sail of the "Eros" glittering in the sun, as the boat sped back homeward. "All that I can do now is to show up with the Consul, his lawyer, my new dragoman "Melloni," and use Van Lennep's sagacity to aid my protest to-morrow. They will soon be out of here with the whole thing, ship, cargo and crew, and I have been defeated at every turn."

There was an unwonted animation in Howard Vinton's eagle countenance as he sprang up the steps of the Consulate, when the dainty "Eros" had folded her wings for the night. He rapidly joined Drage in an inner room. "They have now a hundred roustabouts stowing fresh cargo in the 'Cornaro,' and all the engines are busied at work, loading the first bark from the cargo of the ship.

"The three donkey engines are all at work and, as far as my glass would tell, all the laborers are Turks. I got not a single sign of Jack Masterson's presence on the 'Cornaro,' but," said the young fellow with an air of triumph,

"I ran across the boatman of Sandy McPherson, the fellow who keeps the 'Scottish Arms' here. He signaled to me as I was running down the bay, and I luffed up and towed him alongside for a moment. Then he carefully whispered, 'Cruise around here all day to-morrow. Your friend is closely watched, but he will find a way to get you a message. Watch out for him on the barges! They have the whole crew now cooped up on the empty bark, and Schnorr won't even let them go on the steamer now.'

"The Turkish officers have all the affair in charge.

Masterson will sneak out and get on the barges to-morrow, and I will come out on the bay again, myself."

"Well, my boy, we must only wait," dejectedly said the disgusted old Inspector. "You are now my forlorn hope, for I've a notion this corrupt Turkish Pasha Rustem is a full partner in the firm. If they officially decide against me I will just send the yacht away to deceive them, and soon after vanish myself. Our one last hope is to catch them napping here!"

"Let us see what to-morrow will bring forth! Luck may turn with the tide," stoutly said Vinton. "I've half a notion to go over to Constantinople myself now and see this strange woman Agathe!"

"Not yet!" cried Enos Drage. "Not yet! If we fail in everything else, we may find through her lover a golden way to unlock the secrets of Komanos and Company. Her lover Nicolo will soon make his way to her side for she dare not openly return here. She would be made a victim! It is possible that the death of Bouclair will divide these schemers into a dozen little knots! If they do break up soon, then, through Captain Nicolo we may yet frustrate all their schemes. If he were once put under the secret protection of the British Embassy he might be very useful as our best secret agent! Alas! We have, however, missed the one rare chance to bag the whole outfit!"

Captain Drage put off to spend the night before the Pasha's hearing of the claim for the custody of the "Alessandro Cornaro" in conference with the convalescent Van Lennep.

In the halls of the Pasha's palace that same night, there was an eager convocation of the excited members of the local band of Forty Thieves. Rustem Pasha was now secretly trembling at heart. He feared the loss of the "Pachalic," and that the golden river of bribes and backsheesh might run dry. To him, the sands of the little river Meles were Pactolean. A crowd of inferior officers, eunuchs, messengers, brokers, merchants and government spies anxiously

haunted the outer offices. Within, seated on his divan, Rustem Pasha toyed with the black amber head of his diamond jeweled chibouque. Caspari, the Pasha's dragoman, and the alert Ernest Schnorr were now gathered around the bloated official.

There was a long and artful discussion of every possible outcome of the public hearing. After merchant Caspari had exhausted his sycophantic pleading, and the grave dragoman had urged on his vacillating master, then, Ernest Schnorr took up the same siren song.

"The gold purses shall be delivered to you as soon as your public decision is rendered against this Frankish fool! The English war ships dare not interfere! I have my plans all made now, and the very moment that you announce the decision, I will take out all the official papers and, in a week, we will clear out the three ships, the sailing vessels will depart in one way and these troublesome steamers in another. I will remain here in your hands as an open hostage. Leave it to me, but only decide at once, and in our favor."

"Hear his wise words, Great Pasha!" chimed in the artful Caspari. "I will venture my own head and my fortune upon my friend's faith."

"Good! Let it be so!" grunted the Pasha. "What must I do?"

"Hear them first," slyly suggested the delighted Schnorr, "and leave the answer to me. Your dragoman will write down now in Turkish the decision you shall render, and Caspari Effendi will prepare it for him to-night, and I will go and sack up the gold."

A cunning gleam lit up the greedy Pasha's face. "Let there be no mistake as to the money! The ships go not forth until it is paid." And so, in this notable fashion, the decision was duly prepared before the trial, which was an incontestable proof that "modern institutions" in the way of "assisted justice" can flourish under the regime of the heirs of Mahomet, as well as behind the serried cohorts of a Tweed Ring.

For gold,—the all compelling gold—has its same jingling siren song, ready the world over to deafen the ear of justice. Whereupon, Caspari, the Dragoman, and the now invincible Schnorr departed to make a night of it, in improved Smyrniote fashion. It was the night before the battle.

The Council Chamber of Rustem Pasha was filled early on the morrow with all the notables of the great Levantine entrepot. A council of wise mollahs, a board of apathetic officers gleaming in tinseled uniform, a squad of attentive scribes, and a dozen haughty guard officers surrounded the great man, while the rival contestants appeared before him gravely supported with a throng of lawyers, dragomen, kavasses, clerks and pale-faced interpreters.

There was no sign of impatience on the grave old Pasha's sphinx-like face as he listened to the still feeble Van Lennep, the energetic British Consul and the vigorous Captain Drage. The morning's journals all replete with the dozen wild rumors were duly read. The irregular behavior of the Greek captain, Dimitri Nicolo, in England, his deceit at Malta, the sudden flight to Boulogne, the refusal to open the hatches, the impending departure from Malta for Taganrog, and the reasons of the deviation to Smyrna, were all duly set forth. And, finally, the suspicious insurance of the cargo for enormous sums in London, without the due inspection required by law, all these were brought up to assist Captain Drage's demand for an examination of the ship's papers as well as the cargo, to see if the Turkish authorities had not been unwittingly defrauded out of proper credentials.

It was three long hours before the British Consul had concluded the case for the seekers of the embargo, and the acute Ernest Schnorr moved up before the attentive Pasha, with his secret partner, Caspari, and the official dragoman at his side to resist the plea of the complainants.

There was no sign of bitterness in Schnorr's manner, as he submissively laid his case before the great

Rustem Pasha. Yet Drage and the Consul, Van Lennep and the attentive "Melloni," who closely followed each other, marveled at all the easy assurance of the specious pleader. "It is for us to appeal to the justice of the Sultan, and to demand now that our rights be confirmed at Stamboul.

"The ship is now legally under the Turkish flag, and she is even now being loaded for Taganrog, in Russia, at the mouth of the Don, with a new cargo. The cargo once taken to England is being loaded upon the two sailing ships to be delivered at Trieste in Austria, and all these three vessels will proceed forthwith upon their voyages in peace when Your Highness deigns to give the orders for our official papers of clearance to be signed.

"The cargo was secretly purchased in England by speculators to be delivered later, in Trieste. I have here a guarantee in Messrs. Caspari and Company, who will sign all the needed bonds. As for these English enemies, they may as well know that the ship, the barks, and the three cargoes will not be insured again in English companies.

"There is not a debt of a guinea hanging over us, nor a single complaint filed with the Greek or English or French Consul. The three ships' papers will all be made regular by the Russian and Austrian Consul! And I now humbly ask that the prayers of these men be denied!"

There was consternation in the faces of Captain Drage and his supporters as the Pasha, making a sign to his own dragoman, slowly rose and hobbled out to deliberate. The argument was specious and plausible enough. The angry contestants glared at each other in silence, but a serene confidence shone out on the face of Ernest Schnorr, as he contemptuously glared at old "Shun Lee" Drage. He knew the little by play which was going on in the Pasha's most remote chamber, for "Komanos and Company" were already working there with their golden key.

There was a bustle of excitement as the great Rus-

tem and his suite re-entered the crowded Council Chamber. Leaning over to an old scribe he calmly muttered a few words, and then the Dragoman loudly cried out the decision:

"In the name of the Sultan, the prayer of the petitioners is denied. The three ships are free to proceed upon their way without molestation!"

The Englishmen sprang up in protest. "I demand the examination on oath of the masters of the vessels and all the officers of the 'Cornaro'! I will appeal to the British Ambassador!" cried the angered Consul.

When the Dragoman had translated the reply of the Consul, then Ernest Schnorr calmly said, "Highness, I have paid off all the crew, and I shall now ask that they be sent to Stamboul by you, to await the future pleasure of the Sultan, for further inquiry. The steamer will have a new crew for Taganrog."

The Pasha was tired, he was puzzled, and he had already reaped his golden harvest. Whereat, he sullenly said: "It is ended! Let them all go forth!" And then, attended by his retinue, he disappeared under the rich curtains of the adjoining saloon. It was a Waterloo for Lloyds, a sickening blow!

In the silence of defeat, the inspector of Lloyds left the Hall of Justice, followed by the astonished counselors who could hardly believe their ears. Captain Drage drove down with Van Lennep to the strand and at once disappeared below the decks of the "Conqueror."

"I suppose that fellow Caspari has done the whole business," said the dismayed Van Lennep. "He is of Greek birth, but a registered Turkish subject, and he is of a vast influence in Stamboul, Smyrna, Alexandria, and he has undoubtedly promptly bribed the Pasha. It is clear that if the Austrian and Russian Consuls give them these papers and regular clearances, then, our hold upon these people is lost forever."

The sturdy English Consul and his official staff slowly returned to the Consulate, followed by an ex-

cited running guard of Smyrna's idle loungers. And soon, through café and garden, at the table d'hote of the Hotel Huck, in all the hundred meeting places of the sly Levantines, the scattered members of the long victorious criminal syndicate laughed the British lion to scorn.

In the Customs House and on the mole, already the scribes were hastily preparing the official papers, which, once stamped and sealed, were the death blow to Enos Drage's dearest ambition.

The old man, wolfishly impatient, walked the deck of the "Conqueror," glass in hand and followed the course of the "Eros" flitting about the harbor.

He drew a long breath and sighed heavily as he saw the "Eros'" sail suddenly brail up, and she lay there, drifting idly, a half-mile to the leeward of the anchored steamer, fringed with its encircling barges. It was easy to see that the greatest activity was now displayed in hastening the departure of the phantom steamer.

The first bark, well loaded down, had been warped away, and the second now rode high at the side of the "Alessandro Cornaro." Long pondering over the dead lock, stern old Enos Drage hardly noticed the passage of the fleet "Eros" as she sped homeward to her anchorage in front of the British Consulate. He was about to seat himself at the dinner table when quick steps were heard on deck and Sergeant Foley rushed into the cabin.

"Come off at once to the Consulate! There's great news for you! I will stay here till dark! You must go ashore in your own boat and then take a carriage. We may be keenly watched—and—a man's life hangs on your prudence now."

Then, a wintry smile of hope at last lit up Drage's bronzed face. This boy makes a fool of me after all. He seems to have the lucky hand." The cutter was lowered and the sturdy British tars strained the ash as Drage hurried to join Howard Vinton.

The first carriage on the mole was hailed, and, with-

out a word of greeting, Captain Drage dashed into Howard Vinton's room. The young American excitedly sprang up to meet him. He carefully locked the door. "I know all the story of the Pasha's decision against you," said Vinton. "But I've now opened the road to trap these fellows at last!" He produced an humble-looking pale ale bottle, neatly broken in two halves. "Here is Jack Masterson's ingenious Ocean Mail Express!" While Drage wondered, the young lover produced a hastily scrawled paper. "I picked this important message up when it had drifted half a mile or more from the ship, and waited an hour to get at it without attracting attention. Listen!"

Howard Vinton's eyes gleamed out triumphantly as he read: "There's been a noisy shindy on board, between Captain Nicolo, the engineer McGregor, the mate Corvini, and this scoundrel, Ernest Schnorr. The three men want their pay now for all the crooked work they have done, and they know now, too, that Captain Drage is following them up, to seize the cargo. The whole ship's company is kept off the 'Cornaro,' and we are camping out on the loaded bark.

"Schnorr is going to send us all to Constantinople to get us out of the way, and the three men are mortal afraid of being put in a Turkish prison and there silenced for good, or else kept there till all is over, and then robbed and kicked out without a guinea! This man Schnorr has a heavy guard of Turkish soldiers, and the three officers are now afraid they may be treacherously finished off, even here. Here is the whole secret of this German fellow's game. I know it, but the other men do not.

"The two sailing ships are being really loaded with the *new cargo*, and the *old bogus cargo* is still in the 'Cornaro!' The cargo from the barges is just passed over the decks into the two barks. So, Mr. Schnorr has got the old 'jerry stuff' still loaded on the 'Cornaro!'

"It's my idea that he will try to fool the people who

are pursuing him into turning off to Trieste and chasing after these two honestly loaded barks. What he will do with the old steamer and the humbug cargo, I don't know. He may try to swindle the Russians in some new way, or the greenhorns may insure all heavily at Constantinople. Then, look out for a wreck!

"Now, you and Captain Drage must closely follow this ship up when she leaves. But for Heaven's sake, don't abandon me to these fierce brutes! Schnorr would have me killed in a minute. The Greek captain, too, is crazy to know where the woman Agathe Mitis is, and he wanted Schnorr to tell him. Schnorr does not know himself, and he is also afraid that these desperate men will betray him. He wants to keep them all hidden till after he has got the steamer and the humbug cargo well out of the way. Then, of course, they can whistle for their money.

"Now, Sandy McGregor is disgusted and yet I don't dare to trust him. But Nicolo is simply mad, he is love crazy! If you can send me word where the Greek woman is, I will hold that over Nicolo, and he will soon betray the whole thing. He will do anything to meet the woman whom he loves again. Trust to me, and I'll soon bring you out all right.

"I would go to Stamboul if I were you, and have Captain Drage send the yacht away cruising after the two barks. That's what they expect him to do. Then let Captain Drage sneak quietly on to Constantinople!

"He can get over to Taganrog before the 'Alessandro Cornaro,' and, with the help of the British and Russian ministers, nab them there, and seize the whole thing. You must work quick. The steamer sails in two days, and we will all be sent up to Stamboul on the next Turkish steamer. I'll get the whole story out of them, but, if you can find out the woman first, at Stamboul, then you can, by a reasonable bribe, have it all your own way. Schnorr is afraid of her.

"The messenger from McPherson will hang around the Consulate to-night. Send me a box of cigars

sealed up, and you can safely put your letter in the bottom under the cigars. Say nothing to him. McPherson will pay him well. He always smuggles for the old Scotchman, and I am helping the 'Scottish Arms' in a neat little turn now."

"There's the whole story," said Vinton, but there was no word of reply. Enos Drage had darted down the stairs.

The old man came puffing back in a trice. "The Russian steamer 'Tsaritza' leaves for Stamboul tomorrow morning at nine," said he. "I wish you, Howard, to go on board of her at the very last moment, in a man-of-war's boat. I'll get you a naval undress uniform. Leave all your own things here. Say nothing, not even a word to Foley. I'll have the Consul square up all our accounts of honor and all your things will be well taken care of, mail and all will be handled. You will go right to the British Embassy and stay there. All that you have to do is to handle that dancing woman! I'll join you the very moment the three vessels leave here.

"Just write a scrawl now to Jack Masterson. Tell him that the British Embassy will protect him. I'll give you a few unsigned words also. Write the address of the woman, but not her name, and then send the messenger off to the barges at once. Tell him to have the man leave word with McPherson at the Scottish Arms if Jack gets the whole thing all safe, otherwise let him bring all back. I'll telegraph you all the news to Stamboul. Foley can bring me back the word."

It was nine o'clock in the evening when Howard Vinton strolled down the masonry boatsteps and saw the secret messenger of the beleaguered Masterson row smartly away toward the great four-master. The simple words "Café Gréco, Christakis Nicolo, Galata," were the talisman which was to open the dark past and veiled future of Komanos and Company, at the eager bidding of a hungry love burning in the heart of a desperate adventurer.

Three men sat till late in the night in Consul Fitz-

gerald's private room, while the stars glittered down on Smyrna Bay. Out on the tranquil waters, a hundred glittering lights told of the feverish activity of the dispatch of the three vessels. There was high wassail and carnival in the great warehouse of Caspari and Company, where a crowd of delighted underlings watched Caspari, Schnorr and the Chief of Customs lingering in grave conference at a side table.

"There's but one thing left to watch over now," said Caspari, as the three exchanged their congratulations. "The insurance on the 'Alessandro Cornaro,' and to handle the great cargo."

"I have already covered that by a merchant's bond as far as Stamboul. There I will do the rest. The bond will be good evidence. I go up on the 'Apollo,'" said Schnorr. "The 'Cornaro' will anchor off Galata and wait till I'm done. Then I'll telegraph to you, and you can always dispatch the news to our agents there." The wine and laugh went round among the villains. The road was open at last to a clear victory, and a gain of a vast fortune.

A man-o'-war's cutter lay waiting at the steps in front of the Consulate. Howard Vinton sat musing over all his strange life in Smyrna. "I'm sorry not to say good-bye to Van Lennep and to the brave Foley, to the gay Melloni, that transformed Irishman. It all seems like a wild dream. I had coasted all around the barges and the barks, and watched the steamer with my glass, till at last I caught sight of Jack Masterson perched on the prow of a barge, holding up this bottle, and leisurely drinking of it. He repeated the motion several times, and I then saw him cast it far away out to leeward with a grand flourish.

"It was my boat keeper who said strangely enough, 'I wonder if he is chucking that bottle overboard for us to pick up?' And we then maneuvered for an hour with our eyes fixed on that drifting bottle before I dared to stand along and pick it up."

"It was very neatly done in old Jack Masterson,"

said the excited Enos Drage. "Now that we have the tip, we are surely two duffers if we don't land this rascal at last." At two o'clock, Howard Vinton stepped off the war vessel and next morning there was an admiring smile on the face of several sprightly women passengers as the handsome young man, clad in his naval undress uniform, leaped on the "Tsaritza," the very last man to board her.

Vinton was seated on deck gazing at beautiful Imbro, when the huge "Cornaro," her Turkish flag proudly waving a last defiance, steamed out from Smyrna and sought the Dardanelles.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE CAFE GRECO IN CONSTANTINOPLE!—THE CHANGED CREW!—A TYRANT SUPERCARGO! —AGATHE'S PLAN!—THE FORLORN HOPE!

On the morning after the sailing of the now famous "Alessandro Cornaro" for Taganrog, Russia, there were a hundred pairs of curious eyes expectantly riveted upon the swan-like British yacht "Conqueror." The over-anxious conspirators were, however, disappointed. There was no smoke pouring out of her brass-bound funnels, and the trim cutter lazily rocked at the end of a spar boom. Only the lolling deck watch gave any signs of life.

The broad mole of Smyrna was crowded with spectators, who idly watched the long line of emptied freight barges returning from the two sailing barks, whose patched sails, all loosened now, glittered brown and faded in the morning sun. Seated in the Pasha's splendid lounging room, Mr. Ernest Schnorr awaited eagerly the return of his trusty spies, circulating over the busy town under guise of agents of the great house of Caspari.

The clearance papers of the two sailing vessels

bound for Trieste, lay all in readiness before the new manager of "Komanos and Company." It was noon before the returning messengers had reported that the British Consul was lounging idly in his office, that no pratique for the yacht's departure had been asked at the Customs House, and that neither the now notorious Captain Enos Drage nor his hidden henchman, Adolph Van Lennep, had been seen stirring about.

As the long afternoon wore away, the presence of two great coal barges beside the "Conqueror" indicated the preparations for an immediate departure. "I think that I can now see their game," laughed Schnorr. "The fools have taken the tempting bait. I will soon test their impatience to be off on a fool's errand to Trieste. We are just playing a game of nautical hide and seek, my good friend, Captain Drage, the insurance spy, and I."

The Pasha and his guest laughed merrily, an hour later, when two heavy tugs raced out of the basin behind the breakwater, and then, speeding away to the barks, prepared to tow the deeply laden vessels out into the channel.

"There, up go the anchors," cried Schnorr, watching with his field glasses, "and up goes the circle K flag. Now, we will see some rare fun!" Before the vessels had proceeded a half-mile under tow, a breathless messenger dashed in from the Customs Bureau. "Pratique for Athens for the yacht 'Conqueror,' just taken out," he announced, as Schnorr tossed him a couple of guineas. "Hurrah!" joyously cried the excited German Jew. "There is the smoke pouring out of the yacht's funnels now, and Mr. Enos Drage is getting his table delicacies on board. He has taken the bait." A score of little bumboats were paddling out to the yacht, and the thistle flag of the "Scottish Arms" sailor boarding-house was seen flying over a barge with a half-dozen of the "Conqueror's" "celebrating" crew, whose "day off" on leave was cut short. Ernest Schnorr gayly laughed. "This fellow will not be able to see the barks put off the 'Cornaro's' crew

on the tugs. He will have to wait a couple of hours for a show of prudence."

It was even so! The official barge of the British Consulate lay for an hour idly rocking alongside the "Conqueror" before her bronze screw turned over.

"This old whisky and water warrior is a deep one," mused the ruminant Schnorr. "He will race and dodge along, and then suddenly turn up with a flourish of trumpets at Trieste. When all his mysterious artillery is loaded, he will break out in a great explosion: 'British rights!' 'Gross frauds!' and all that. Thank God! It will cost him a few thousand pounds thrown away when he finally finds that the two cargoes are sound to the core, that every cask of oil, box of raisins, bag of valonia and chest of opium is veritably fresh, and 'A. 1' in quality. He can just pay the costs and demurrage and then see the goods rushed on to London, sold to arrive even now at a double price. And then he can go along home and show himself up as an ass, the fool he is—outwitted, outplayed, outgeneraled!"

Schnorr laughed as he recalled how he had divined the Captain's hot-headed pursuit. "The first tug will follow him out for fifty miles to the mouth of the Gulf and see him take up the stern chase. He will be about twenty days box hauling all around the Adriatic before he gets up to Trieste. And no telegrams, no spies, no meddling British Consuls, moreover no mails!"

Schnorr laughed. "My work will be done when he arrives at Trieste, and he will never care to return to Smyrna. He is a fool and the son of a fool."

The manager of "Komanos and Company" chuckled at the joy of the delighted Pasha as the white hulled "Conqueror" soon gathered headway and glided along slowly out of the range of his leaden eyes.

"Dogs of Feringhees! May they drown like the dogs they are! Now I am safe! For the war vessels are all going out on a cruise. The English are the

only ones whose cannon I fear, for the wily Russians are our secret friends now!"

"I will go and see the editors of 'La Reforma' and the 'Journal de Smyrne,'" now briskly said Schnorr to Caspari, who had arrived breathless with the good news. "I will send five hundred copies of the Smyrna papers to all the Levant trade in London!" "It was not a bad deal, my friend, after all," laughed Caspari. "We should really have sent off to Captain Drage a couple of cases of the best champagne. The London fever of speculation was never so high!" The moment that poor Bouclair told me of you sending the ship back, we turned in and engaged every guinea's worth of marketable goods in the town. Now the profits of these two fresh cargoes, sold to arrive, will give us twenty thousand pounds over our lost expenses. There's not a chest of opium left in Asia Minor!"

"And," said Schnorr, "my voyage with the 'Cornaro' to Taganrog will leave us a hundred and twenty five thousand pounds to divide. The coast is perfectly clear now. See here, Caspari, did this fellow Bouclair leave any legal heirs? They might trouble you, you know, about joint account on these two Trieste cargoes."

"Ah! No!" laughed Caspari. "His sudden death was a very lucky stroke for us. There's only you and I and the Pasha left to divide the profits of the Taganrog venture. These other fellows are afraid of Rustem and they will have to be content with one general dividend, as we choose to make it! As for the late Bouclair, the French Consul refuses to handle his inheritance, and he has abandoned the administration!"

"As an escaped convict, Emile was already legally dead, and so no one can inherit." "Who the deuce did kill him anyway?" mused Schnorr. "A very coward at heart!" "I really think that some of the Greek fellows who played with him just sneaked in and got their loose money back. You'll find that witch of a

woman turn up with some new lover, a handsome young fellow!"

"What about Nicolo?" doubtfully said Schnorr. "He was a good five thousand miles away, and there is yet an old murder case hanging over him. No, some new fancy! Some of these rich young merchants! Some headlong devil of a Greek did the job! You must never let that same precious couple come together, however! It might mean ruin to us!"

"Ah! I have that thing all fixed," said Schnorr, his lips closing in a grim snap. "When I'm done with him, he will be brought back to Constantinople, then Rustem Pasha will have him quietly arrested and—put where he will never bother us! The Bimbashi he killed has friends who will save us." "I see," said Caspari. "That's a good idea, and the big Englishman is an outlaw, and if you keep him drunk he doesn't care. He dare not go home to England!"

"Oh! we will be the best of friends. I need that fellow. This won't be my last run," laughed Schnorr. "McGregor only wants rum, his own way, and a week ashore now and then. A hundred pounds now and then will keep him in a Fool's Paradise—happy and —drunk!"

"When do you leave?" anxiously inquired Caspari. "Just as soon as the Turkish steamer is loaded, and I get the 'Cornaro's' crew on board," replied Schnorr. "I wish to see these journalists and have their issues all right. Then to get the tug's report that the 'Conqueror' is really standing off in chase of the two barks. Rustem has told the Turkish captain to sail to-night at any hour I may fix."

"How will you control these rough fellows, Schnorr?" demanded the anxious capitalist. "Ah! there comes in Rustem Pasha. He sends a captain, two lieutenants and thirty men up to Constantinople to bring some women down here for their three harems. The Pashas of Bagdad and Erzeroum are sending caravans in for some harem women. Now, this guard

will control the crew. The officers are secretly ordered to obey me."

"And if the Greek, Italian or English minister makes a row!" "Tell them the men are only held to await the result of this fool's appeal to Stamboul. Rustem Pasha will be sustained, and I'll have the men really in my power. The orders are given not to let them leave my service till the appeal is dismissed!"

"And what can I do now?" the capitalist partner asked. "Only meet me at ten o'clock on the 'Abdul Aziz,' that's all. Then I'll give you my last directions and you can telegraph me to Stamboul. Rustem Pasha will send all your messages in Turkish. His brother Halim Pasha is chief of the Arsenal Museum on Seraglio Point, and he will keep these men together for me! If any of them rebel"—Schnorr's face darkened, as he significantly drew his hand across his throat. "You see, Caspari; you and I are linked now with Rustem Pasha in a partnership to the death! These fools of ours here must do as Rustem orders! His place depends on you and I keeping faith! Your life and property the same!"

"And you?" said Caspari, shuddering slightly.

"I risk my time, my capital, my profit,—and—the confidence of the Hebrew traders of the Levant. It is more than life to me! It is my all in this world and the next! No Hebrew ever betrayed his tribe! Our own people are the brokers who reinsure for me at Stamboul!"

The two sly wretches parted after draining a bottle of champagne to the health of the mighty Rustem Pasha, now lolling at ease in his curtained harem!

The sun glare showed no unusual activity on the streets of Smyrna as Ernest Schnorr tranquilly drove around and closed up all his personal affairs. The Grand Hotel Huck frontage was deserted save by lazy beggars and loitering servants, and all the marts were steeped in the drowsy afternoon languor. Schnorr noted the British Consul's barge still lingering at the side of the "Euryanthe."

"Ah! Your teeth are all drawn, my wolfish friend!" he laughed, as he entered the sanctum of the editor of the "Journal de Smyrne." "There's nothing to watch now! I'll show you a trick or two yet!"

In half an hour, the General Manager of "Komanos & Company" had sketched out a glowing article in defense of the vindicated Smyrniote merchants so brutally assaulted.

"You can have 'La Reforma' rewrite and publish this, with variations. Then see Caspari at once, and get your money! Send fifty of each journal off at once to me, at Constantinople, to Halim Pasha—Arsenal Museum—and deliver five hundred of each to Caspari! Let me have the proofs surely before midnight, sent to the 'Abdul Aziz'!"

The "glorious vindication" neatly accomplished, Ernest Schnorr proceeded to the Customs Bureau, where he laughed over the report of the returning tug captain, who had noted the "Conqueror" clinging to the wake of the two barks, and gliding along at half-speed.

"In the trap! In the trap!" merrily laughed Ernest Schnorr, as he jumped on the tug to run over and hoodwink Dimitri Nicolo, the poor Corsair whose "final putting away" he had just so neatly arranged. He was useless to them after he had done his last little stroke of business "for Komanos and Company."

"They will believe my lie!" grinned Schnorr, who had at the last moment caused a dozen boxes of cigars and a half-dozen cases of Chypre and Marsala, to be put on the tug.

"It will be a sort of picnic—a love feast—all round! They are tight in my trap, and Rustem and his brother Halim hold the key! I will stop these three fellows' mouths for good soon!"

A quiet jubilation was proceeding in the cabin of the commander of the "Euryanthe" at the very same moment. It was a day of general jubilation in Smyrna. Rustem Pasha was also happy over the departed "Conqueror." Caspari saw his own golden future

smiling before him. Schnorr's delight was only equaled by the gray-headed old English fleet captain's satisfaction.

"Fitzgerald," he said over his "navy sherry," "the gang are trapped at last! You say that young Vinton has 'carte blanche' as Lloyds' agent to act for you at Stamboul. The ambassador will then give him both men and his own secret help. The Russian ambassador, too, will send some fellows on board the 'Cornaro' as deck passengers. They won't dare to refuse him!

"Now, if Van Lennep just keeps steadily on and dogs these two barks into Trieste, these scoundrels will think that old Captain Drage is still aboard the yacht! The sly old dog can jump off at Athens, take a steamer to Odessa, and be at Taganog, ready to sieze the 'Cornaro.' Vinton will be guarded at the Embassy in Stamboul and he can get secret reports of this fellow Schnorr's maneuvers. The insurance of a false cargo will be the final ruin of the whole operations of 'Komanos and Company'!"

"And so, the English stoker got Vinton's message?"

"We had word back through the 'Scottish Arms'' messenger. He will post me to-night where the crew go to. For Sandy McPherson is allowed to feed and supply them."

"Good!" laughed the fleet captain. "My steam launch will be ready at nine o'clock. Don't come off till it is dark, and come back in a canoe. They might watch your own boat!"

It was midnight when Caspari shook hands with Schnorr on the main deck of the "Abdul Aziz."

"Every man of them happy as lords!" laughed Schnorr. "Not one missing! They have not seen the decks of the 'Cornaro' since we dropped anchor, and they can now tell no tales. For Nicolo, Corvini and the two Englishmen are half tipsy, and the smart Greek is fooled to the top of his bent!"

The two men clasped hands.

"Halim Pasha will telegraph, of course, to Rustem

Pasha when I've done the trick. I will come back to Stamboul and then settle the insurance. You had better come over there at once. So we will meet next at Stamboul. I will not dare to write or telegraph to you."

The happy Caspari descended to his launch, and the last boat to leave the "Abdul Aziz" as she swung toward the mouth of the gulf was the bumboat of the "Scottish Arms." The "Abdul Aziz" was well under way when the boatman of the "Scottish Arms" pulled up alongside of a steam launch gliding out of the darkness. The transfer of a note to Consul Fitzgerald left the boatman's hand full of Turkish guineas.

"Put me now on shore," whispered the Consul to a rosy ensign, as he read the little scrawl in the cabin by the binnacle light. "Then follow that steamer to the mouth of the gulf and see that she is not boarded. Report all to the fleet captain."

"I've the tip!" said the youngster, as he raced back to leave the Consul at the Hotel Huck landing.

"Now, one telegram, and the last link of the chain is riveted," mused the overwearied British Consul. When he had seen the hastily traced lines clicked off on the keys, Fitzgerald strolled into a café garden, and indulged in a quiet cooling draught of "bitter."

"The last act can be fought out by the principals, and, as they have now the whole Black Sea to themselves, they are welcome to all the fun. The whole thing will be a nine days' wonder, and then some other Levantine sensation will chase its memory away. Old Captain Enos may yet find out that a stern chase is a long one!"

But there was a grim satisfaction in the Consul's musings as he called the nearest passing carriage and rolled home to his slumbers.

"I may meet them next at the wedding—if I go home on leave."

He found the anxious Foley, well-armed and still on watch for the return of his chief.

"Where's Melloni, the dragoman?" said the Consul.

"Stole away with the old Captain. He wants to be in at the death."

There was a remarkably handsome young fellow who leaped out of his couch at the British Embassy in Stamboul, early the next morning, and drowsily rubbed his eyes, as he sprang to the window to read Consul Fitzgerald's telegram.

"Ah!" mused Mr. Howard Vinton. "This means business! Now for the Café Gréco!" He slowly read the lines, and his face grew grave and stern:

"Two barks have sailed for Trieste. Van Lennep follows in 'Conqueror' Your friend went by Athens and Odessa, direct to Taganrog. Whole crew of 'Cornaro' are now on 'Abdul Aziz,' steamer which sailed for Stamboul at midnight. Schnorr is on board. Beware of him! Watch the steamer. Masterson is well. All now depends on you. Meet the 'Abdul Aziz' on its arrival."

The young man hastily dressed.

"I have only twenty-four hours to act! Here I must make no mistake! For one single false step on my part might ruin all!"

He had finished his toilet, and paced the room an hour after his coffee before he decided upon his course.

"I will see both the English and the Russian ambassadors. These men must be located, and I must have all Jack Masterson's secret reports. If there is a game to make, it will surely be made here."

He had a two hours' drive around the romantic old walls to freshen his brain, before the "High and Mighties" were visible.

Never had there been such an eager interest in the journals of Smyrna, as on this very morning when Howard Vinton was calmly putting up his plan of campaign at Stamboul. The simultaneous trumpet-blasts of "La Reforma" and the "Journal de Smyrne," in different tones, extolled the wisdom and firmness of the great Rustem Pasha whose vigor had defended

the "legitimate operations" of several of "our highly esteemed commercial houses."

The sailing of the two Turkish barks for Trieste, the departure of the "Alessandro Cornaro" for Taganrog was duly chronicled, and the fact that the Austrian and Russian consuls had both given uncontested clearances. The regular insurance of the Trieste cargoes in the "Riunione Adriatica," under the double guarantee of "Komanos and Company" and "Caspari and Company" was proudly announced.

The fact that the Customs Bureau had officially inspected the denounced cargo was also declared to be a triumphant vindication of "commercial honor," and the fact that local Turkish merchants had underwritten the "Alessandro Cornaro" and her new Russian cargo, was proudly displayed! With a coy profundity, the secret of the great joint London and Smyrna speculations was shyly admitted. The London market had been adroitly cornered as to all Levantine goods, the huge cargo of the "Cornaro" being sold for Continental use, to be delivered at Trieste.

The great combination gaining control of the home market had ruined the London speculators and so brought fortunes to Smyrniote holders. It was blazoned that the "Alessandro Cornaro," having delivered the first Levantine cargo of the season at the mouth of the Don, would load a return cargo of wheat, linseed, hempseed, skins and Russian leather, from the rich shores of the Azov, for London direct.

With pride, the great freighter, now under the Turkish flag, was hailed as the pioneer of a line under the circle K flag, representing the "eminent merchants whose interests had been only assailed through insurance spies representing defeated British speculators."

There were some judiciously spread-eagled compliments in the dulcet Italian of "La Reforma" and the crisp French of the "Journal de Smyrne," referring to the "great house made the target of these vile attacks,"

and the lengthened columns teemed with the admiration of "all commercial circles" for the wonderful ability and firmness of that modern Solomon, Rustem Pasha!

The sharply barbed references to the "hasty slinking away of the defeated British spies" closed the artful appeals to High Heaven and the honor of the Levant mercantile circles. The hugely delighted Caspari carefully perused these vindications, and in his secret heart only feared that Schnorr had "overloaded the gun a little"; while Consul Fitzgerald grimly smiled, as he hastened to mail some exemplars of the articles to London and Stamboul, as well as the British Consul at Taganrog.

And all Smyrna now read the bugle blasts, and gossiped over cheroot, hubble bubble, or narghileh. Rustem Pasha nodded his greasy approval, as he nursed his diamond-gemmed chibouque, and the great "Devil's Auction" under Mont Pagus dreamed along in a snug Lotos land of its own, forgetting that stern-faced Englishman with the conical head who had stirred up the hornet's nest which had driven him so "ignominiously" from Smyrna. And the jubilant "Komanos and Company," to its last secret shareholder, was hugely exalted, in secret glee, and the mantle of the departed Bouclair was secretly vowed to have descended upon the shoulders of a mighty man in stratagem.

Only Caspari, as the dreamy days wore along, waited hungrily for Halim Pasha's expected telegram. And Rustem Pasha easily forgot in his cool harem to secretly watch the hated Fitzgerald who was hidden in his office and designedly made no sign!

The English fleet had gone far out to sea for a two weeks' practice cruise, and Rustem was at liberty to enjoy the gliding dances of the white-bosomed maidens of his seraglio. For all was well, and the enemy was deceived and outwitted!

These were the halcyon days of victory for Schnorr and Caspari! When Howard Vinton clattered down

into the streets of Galata in the Legation carriage, he was fortified with the joint wisdom of the two ruling diplomats of Stamboul.

The British ambassador had given the youth many words of wise counsel. "Let these fellows quietly make their game. I will have the secret service men of the Embassy locate the 'Cornaro' the very moment she arrives. I will have her secretly watched. She will be due here to-day. And the 'Abdul Aziz' to-morrow. I will find where the crew are landed. Let them make the game. Don't spoil it. Find your woman friend! Let her come here and meet you when the 'Abdul Aziz' comes in. You shall have my launch and a couple of guards who know every turn. As for her—in her Turkish disguise her own mother could not recognize her.

"But you are young. She is handsome. Let us see if you can find out what she really knows—and," he smiled, "not tell her all you know first. Of course, if you show the woman the safest way to meet her lover, she is your slave until—until she gets tired of the love and the man. But I don't think she would fancy the chap Schnorr." Vinton blushed at the ambassador's reference to Agathe's attractive charms, and so he fled away in confusion!

It was only after a couple of hours of shopping that Howard Vinton left his carriage at the Pont, and, piloted by a secret guard, sought the cool shades of the Café Gréco.

There were a dozen Turkish officers sipping coffee and sherbet on little tables in front of the dingy interior. A clump of the brown street dogs winked lazily at the accursed Giaour, as they lay in the front of the door. Disengaging himself from a knot of beggars, ring peddlers, valets de place, and then passing far down to the last table, Howard Vinton noted the groups at the round tables busied with cards, drink and dominoes.

For, Lascars, Russians, gypsies, English sailors and German bag men were coarsely dallying with the bold-

faced women who had wandered down the Danube to haunt the lowest of all drinking hells, a sailor café in Galata. Loud cries for "Johnny Greek" resounded from a knot of English tars, as Howard Vinton with some dignity selected the cleanest corner, and then called for a flask of Chypre wine.

He easily recognized Christakis Nicolo, by his air of deferential grandeur, and so, dropping into an easy Italian, asked politely for a moment's private conversation. When they had entered a little booth whence two tawdry Viennese beauties had been ejected by a sharp command, Howard Vinton drew out the picture of Agathe the Serpent from his bosom.

"Tell her that I have come from the Grand Hotel Huck at Smyrna only to see her—I must speak to her about Dimitri Nicolo!"

"Ah! My brother! Gran Dio! You will be welcome! It is the English Milord!" he whispered. "Wait here! I go above!" In five minutes, the Greek returned, his eyes glistening with ill-concealed joy.

"She waits for you, above!" he whispered, as he pointed to a stairway.

Vinton gazed in surprise at the rickety house fashioned of odds and ends of boards and beams, filled in with plaster and rubble stones, and braced to keep it from falling in a heap.

At the head of the stairs, he started in surprise, for the second story was luxuriously, and even artistically, furnished. There was a rustling sound, and Agathe Mitis darted in and seized both his hands. "My poor girl!" the young man gasped, as he gazed at her faded cheeks and noted the fevered glitter of her splendid eyes. The white clinging robe showed all the splendid sinuous loveliness of the beautiful dancer, but, her face was haggard. "Tell me, tell me, is he safe?"

Her hands were burning with the fever of her blood.

"He is well! I have seen him lately! He is coming to us! And, he will be here to-night or to-morrow!"

cried Vinton, forgetting in his excitement all his prudence. He forgot everything else, as the woman's hands relaxed and she sank down at his feet in a sudden swoon.

There was no counterfeit in the love of the woman of the serpent wiles! The whole story was told later as she lay gazing out upon the blue bay beyond Seraglio Point. Howard Vinton sat on the divan at her side and then heard the whole story of her sleepless agony of the last days of torture.

The young American listened to the woman's flute-like voice as she told of all the tangled intrigues thronging her brain.

Suddenly, with a low cry, she started up. "Look, look! The 'Alessandro Cornaro'! Coming around the Point! Let us go!" She struggled to rise, but Vinton detained her. "Remember! Your Dimitri is not there! You and I must try to find the way to him on the 'Abdul Aziz.' Will you only trust to me?"

The beautiful woman pressed her hands over her eyes. "I see it all! They have been baffled! There is some plot! They would now put my poor Dimitri out of the way! In prison, perhaps, or murder him while here!"

With a panther spring, she leaped from the divan, and threw herself down at Vinton's feet. "You have been true to me! You have told Dimitri where I am! You have risked your life for me! I swear on this cross, I will be true to you! I must save him now! Here, in Christakis' house, once here, he is safe! Christakis is rich! The banded Greeks are feared here! I will do as you bid! Take me to him! Take me to him! And I will be your slave—your happy slave—for life!"

"Listen, Agathe!" gently said Vinton. "If you will come to me the very moment the steamer 'Abdul Aziz' comes up, my man will wait here! I will have a steam launch. We will know when she passes the Dardanelles! And, in your Turkish dress, you can go with me. Then, if you will tell me all, I will save

your Dimitri, and he shall have his share of the profits of the cruise!

"They can throw him in prison here! You must be true to me, and I to you, and then, I swear I will have the English Ambassador take him out of their hands and send both you and him safely to Greece, or out of Turkey! Will you promise? You must obey me!"

The desperate woman covered his hands with kisses. He said calmly: "Now, call up Christakis and tell him that I am fighting secretly for his brother's life. And then leave all to me!"

The happy woman darted away. In five minutes the compact was renewed.

"I will send a launch of ours down the shore now," said the Greek. "My own boatmen know the 'Abdul Aziz.' She is a Turkish transport. So we will be ready with our boat to help, and my money—yes, good yellow money—will open the way to him! But the Milord is right! You, Agathe, must try to steal in to see him! No one must suspect! This brutal fellow who comes, this Schnorr, is the friend of Rustem Pasha! and, Rustem's brother rules the arsenal over there!"

He drew away the curtain and showed them the long masonry halls of the arsenal museum shining out on Seraglio Point.

"Let us be wise, and outwit this dull German Jew; a few guineas will take you to him. I will have Schnorr watched. Then, when Nicolo tells his story, and you and I and the Milord know all, we can manage to steal him away and save him, or we can dig a hole and let this dog of a Jew fall into it! If he harms Dimitri,—then, by the Holy Evangels, he dies like a dog here! Christakis Nicolo has a thousand friends here on sea and shore in Galata!"

And so, the stout hearted Greek scoundrel left the American alone with his dangerously beautiful charge.

Suddenly, Agathe Mitis remembered her forgotten

duties of hospitality, and she clapped her hands for a serving woman.

It was two hours before the young man had escaped the spell of her grateful arts of blandishment. He now knew every corner of the woman's heart, and had guarded only the secret of his quest of the inner mysteries of Komanos and Company.

"I will leave one man here! Send him back to me at once! My boat will be ready! Send your own launch out! I will then join you here, and we will not rest until you have met Dimitri face to face! He will either be put back on the great steamer or else kept here! For, the steamer will soon go on its way!"

"If he goes, I will sail, too, with him! He can hide me away," said Agathe.

"But if this devil Sehnorr should go on the 'Cornaro' himself?" dubiously said Vinton.

"Then, Heaven help him if he dares to abuse Dimitri, on his own ship!" cried Agathe, her splendid dark eyes flashing. There was the menace of the serpent in her thrown back head. Howard Vinton's mind was filled with new plans, as his carriage climbed back up the Pera hill.

"If I can only get Jack Masterson posted, and smuggle a few deck passengers on board, I may take a little voyage myself with Captain Dimitri and his tiger-hearted Agathe. Why not? Ernest Sehnorr may for once overplay his own game."

But he bided his peace, and patiently watched for the masts of the "Abdul Aziz." "What the deuce is this fellow Sehnorr's final purpose? He has a hidden coup de theatre lurking behind this new departure. And, I will break through the lines for Lily's sake!"

Howard Vinton was easily chatting with the Secretary of the Embassy, and his eyes had wandered a hundred times over the far blue Sea of Marmora, lit up by the setting sun, when his dinner was suddenly cut short by the entrance of a messenger. "Steamer 'Abdul Aziz' twenty miles down the gulf,

sir! Signaled from our launch to the 'Polynesia,' and then flagged up here!"

The American forgot his dessert and the extra Osmanli cigarettes of surpassing flavor.

"Don't hurry, Vinton! You have lots of time and to spare," said the easy-going Secretary. "I would wait for a little of the evening shadows as well as the coolness." Chandos Grahame, the diplomat, had easily imbibed a bit of the dreaminess of the Lotos Land. But, the American was now on his mettle!

In five minutes, he was at the door of the Café Gréco, with a well-armed attendant, following at a distance.

He had passed in to the hidden beauty nests behind the café, where Christakis Nicolo met him, with sparkling eyes. "My boat has just reported the 'Abdul Aziz.' I've sent the launch away already, towing behind it a fruit peddler's boat, and a couple of my smartest fellows are in that boat dressed up as Moslems. They will be cast adrift, and board the 'Aziz!'

"So, Dimitri will have my messages; he will receive Agathe's letters! The fruit-boat will either hang alongside or follow the men ashore, and my launch will be on the watch! So you are now free to take Agathe and drop down to meet the steamer. Let her manage all! She is as wise as a serpent!

"Go right up to her room. Where is your launch? You must show no flags or any badges of diplomatic rank!"

"That's all right! The boat is waiting at the Pont du Sérail, here!" laughed Vinton. "I will not show myself to the evening." He ran lightly up the stairs and was struck dumb with surprise as he encountered Agathe, clad in all her oriental finery as the queen of the dancing girls.

She came tripping forward, with her elastic stride, and then daintily whirled around, pointing one slender slipper toward the zenith, then, with a mad pirouette sinking gracefully into a chair.

"A strangely unfitting costume for such an excur-

sion, Ma Belle," laughed Vinton. The beautiful woman was now as electric as a spark of fire and flame! "Ah! With a Turkish yashmak and mantle, then the silver veil, and the friendly evening shadows will cover up all this finery. I may have to dance my way into Halim Pasha's good graces, who knows?

"Are your men all to be relied on?" the anxious Agathe asked. "They are the two secret service men of the Embassy, and the three special boatmen of the Legation launch! All are dressed in plain garb and they are well armed." "Then, we will run down the bay at dusk!" said the superb beauty, suddenly transformed from a listless mourner into a being throbbing with Love's very heart hunger! "Let me now play the costumer for you, Milord!"

And, with a marvelous dexterity, she quickly transformed Vinton into the type of an aristocratic Kurd. "That will do!" she laughed, as turban, dagger and pistol, jacket and Turkish trousers, with a flowing sash, were all laid out. A long mantle of dark stuff and a silver-headed staff, made up a swell Levantine garb.

"No one will suspect you! Everyone of the newcomers here tries the effect of a Haroun al Raschid disguise!"

"But what am I to do with all this?" the wondering Yankee said. "It may take you where you would like to be. Now, do as I bid, and trust to me as I trust to you!" So, Howard Vinton made a Kurdish cavalier of himself.

There were a thousand motley costumes mingled in the crowd pressing over the bridge of boats at evenfall, as Agathe and Howard Vinton cautiously entered the first passing carryall. Not a single word was spoken as they entered the launch, which the men were holding on at the bridge landing.

The waters of the silver straits and the blue Golden Horn were covered with the innumerable caiques and boats of all models, from the yacht and swift sidewheeler down to the beggar's leaky canoe; and, once

well out on the sparkling blue, gliding on past Seraglio Point, the swift launch sped along aided by the six-mile current.

"Our own boat has a red and a white light, carried side by side in the bow. We can see it for miles. And she will dog the 'Abdul Aziz' up the stream!"

Agathe the Serpent, leaning back on the cushions, fixed her keen eyes on the darkened sapphire waste before them in silence.

They had been out a half an hour when the dying daylight faded softly into the splendid night where stars, brighter than Fatima's eyes, looked down upon the purpling shore and the rippling, dreaming sea!

"There's the steamer now!" sharply cried the excited Agathe. "Can't you see the red and white lights? Our launch is slowly trailing up behind her now!" Her voice trembled with excitement as she cried, "Run for the red and white light!"

In half an hour, the two little steamers were within speaking distance, and the 'Abdul Aziz' slowly rounded the Pointe du Sérail! The launches were drifting side by side, and a few words in Romaic, told Agathe of Christakis' triumph.

"Two of our men have clambered on board from the fruit boat and it is towing alongside the steamer! She is turning in for mooring at the government anchorage off the Arsenal Museum." Vinton marveled at all the woman's ready wit and keenness! The Greek's boat sped away. "I have told them to guard the Galata side, and to follow the crew to their landing place, if they are removed to Galata! We will steam along the shore and watch the arsenal landing. They will hover near us, if the men are landed here!"

In ten minutes, the "Aziz" was at anchor off the Arsenal and swinging idly with her prow pointing to Scutari. A half dozen heavy barges then swept out from the Sultan's Landing in front of the great Museum where the great Alexander's sarcophagus remains to-day a tribute in the hands of the Moslem spoiler! A powerful steamer towed the barges.

"Look! Look! The soldiers!" said Agathe, tightly clutching Vinton's arm! There were lines of troops formed up now ready to disembark, and when the barges were covered with the motley throng pouring down the gangway, the steamer dragged away with its load to the shore. "Cover yourself well with your mantle," whispered Agathe, as a light cutter swept by "There is Halim Pasha!"

And, hovering around the steamer, at a distance, among the circling caiques of the shore peddlers, they saw a bearded European descend and join the Pasha in his barge, and the sturdy oarsmen gave way for the shore.

"Now, to mix with the landing crowd!" cried Agathe, as she signaled the helmsman. "Remember! You are not to speak, on your life! Follow me! Let me guide you! There is our other boat! See the red and white light!"

Howard Vinton was bravely arrayed in the Kurdish garb, and he drew his Turkish mantle around his stalwart form, as they sprang ashore among the disembarking throng. "Have your own men watch the Pasha's cutter!" Agathe whispered. "Schnorr will probably go over to Galata as soon as this crew is safely within the walls."

There was a chorus of shouting and the clamor of orders, and in five minutes the whole party landed from the "Aziz" had disappeared within the courtyard of the long low barracks. The Greek's launch was floating at the mole where hundreds of Seraglio attendants, soldiers and Moslem promenaders slowly moved along under the white stars. Agathe tripped down to the water's edge, and returned with two men in Turkish garb.

"Let your boat move up and down there within sight of our launch. Now! Follow me to the gates! Nicolo has received my messages, and I will try and go in! *Wait at the gates, and do not stir, for your life!*"

The fearless woman approached the portal within which the soldiery and the crew of the "Cornaro"

had quickly passed. Two stern-looking sentinels barred her way, as, followed by her attendants, she timidly essayed to enter.

Vinton sprang aside, as she threw off her mantle and showed her dancer's garb. A few lazy questions were answered, and she disappeared into the court.

"They think that she is bound for the Seraglio 'on a professional engagement'," mused Vinton. He shrank back into the darkness as Schnorr, followed by a gray-bearded Turk of rank, strode out of the gateway. Vinton's face was well muffled as he approached the water's edge and saw the manager of "Komanos and Company" enter the cutter and the Pasha also, measuredly step down the marble stairs.

The oarsmen struck out smartly for the custom house landing, over on the Galata shore. "Schnorr would like to see his confederates at once—that's the game!" mused Vinton. "Now, the coast is clear!"

He sprang back to his post at the gateway, and watched the inner courtyard. It was filled with a crowd of lolling soldiers and busy attendants.

In a moment, Agathe Mitis was back at his side! "Remember! Speak not! You can have just five minutes! I will bring your friend to you! Then go right out; go on my launch, and take your own and go to Christakis! Tell him I will stay some hours here! And come at nine o'clock to-morrow down to the Café Gréco! You will breakfast with me there, and, I will tell you all!"

At her side, Vinton passed the sentinels, who lazily eyed his Moslem garb and easily leered at the dancing woman. Turning a corner, Agathe pushed him into a dark archway. "Remember! Five minutes! Then I will come for you!"

Hidden in the corner, revolver in hand, the American scarcely dared to breathe, until Jack Masterson's burly shape blocked the entrance! The men's hands met in a crushing grasp.

"Tell me all!" hurriedly said Vinton. "They are just going to send the whole crew back on the 'Cor-

naro' the first thing in the morning. McGregor and I are to go over the engines at once! Nicolo and Corvini, however, are kept here to wait this scoundrel Schnorr's orders! He's been a-quarreling and a-bullying them all the trip! He's a bit soft on old McGregor; but as for the captain and mate, I'm afraid he'll either make away with or hide 'em in some blasted Turkish prison here! That's all! Mac is to get his money at Taganrog! There's a job to be done, and this fellow is going along! I think he means to play Nicolo false! But, he needs Mac and me!"

In a few hurried whispers, Vinton told Jack Masterson of the whole situation. "Stay by the ship, Jack! There'll be friends of yours aboard! You'll see Captain Drage, too, at Taganrog, and the two ambassadors will surely insist on some deck passengers going.

"You'll hear from me again. We'll surely seize the ship at Taganrog! You'll have a dozen secret friends aboard! Now, keep cool and play their game! Once at Taganrog, then you must jump ashore and strike for the British Consul! Captain Drage will be there; and I, too, will be there! Trust to this woman! She will bring my letters and take yours! Their fruit peddler spies will find you out also on the 'Cornaro'!"

There was a rustle, a gliding form, and Agathe seized Vinton's wrist.

"Quick, now, *for your life!* They are closing the gates! The relief guard comes!" And, without a farewell, the American was dragged along, until he saw the ship's lights before him, and he only gazed back to see Agathe the Serpent steal back into the courtyard, just as a half company of troops filed into the guard rooms and the great iron gates were clanged behind him.

"What will not a woman dare—for love?" the young American murmured, as he sprang into the Greek launch. In a few moments, he was safe in his own boat, and gliding along far out on the gleaming Golden Horn. Side by side with his two guards he

elbowed through the noisy night crowds of Galata, having dismissed the Legation's steamer.

While his friends waited in the café, Vinton mounted the stairs with Christakis Nicolo. The Greek laughed at Howard Vinton's anxious fears. "Agathe will get out easily into the Seraglio garden, and soon find her own boat. The beastly Turks take no account of women or dogs running around at night! She knows the way! But," his brow darkened when the American told him of Schnorr's detention of the two officers, "By the Evangels! That greasy wretch dies here, before he quits Stamboul, if he harms Dimitri. I know how to do it! He would swindle him now out of all his desperately gained earnings!

"Agathe and I, without friends, will yet be too much for him. Now, my English friend, a glass of old Chypre, and you must disappear! This place below is only safe for we who are free of Galata. To-morrow, to-morrow! Come, and you shall know all!"

There was no sleep for the young agent of Lloyds until the myriad dogs of Galata were heralding the morn. Vinton was awakened at seven o'clock by his friend, the secretary. "Rouse up, youngster!" cried the diplomat. "Here is a telegram for you from Captain Drage. It was sent to us from the station at the mouth of the Bosporus! He passed on for Odessa at daylight!"

Vinton was eager to keep his tryst with the dauntless Agathe, and he even longed to dare again the dangers of his Kurdish masquerade.

When he reached the Café Gréco, he had recovered his usual composure, and was busily weaving the threads of a plot to counterbalance the last game of Mr. Ernest Schnorr. "It is clear they will do nothing here! If I am to gain any laurels then, I too must be in at the death!" The young man found Christakis Nicolo eagerly awaiting him, and his strange-made friend led him to Agathe's boudoir.

The beautiful dancer's eyes were downcast as she told her visitor the story of the night! "It is just as I

feared," she said, "the scoundrel would rob Dimitri of all that Bouclair owed him. He threatens him with Halim Pasha's vengeance for the dead Bimbashi. To-day the crew is to put back on the 'Cornaro.' But, I shall find my way to Dimitri again to-night! This man Schnorr dares not harm Dimitri now till his ship and cargo are insured. Once that is done, he may then sail away and leave these two men to be cast in prison.

"But one thing will save my poor Dimitri! If the English engineer will not go on the 'Cornaro' unless Dimitri is put in command, Schnorr will be afraid to leave him. They need the engineer, and I will get on board! Let the Italian and Greek Consul also demand these two men, and the two Englishmen can easily be taken off, then Schnorr could not go on to Taganrog! The ignorant Turks here do not know how to take the ship up there."

"You are right, Agathe," said the American. "I will give you a last letter to the stoker. You watch the movements of the crew to-day, and have one of your men get on board of the 'Cornaro.' Schnorr will fear these two Englishmen leaving him, and one single word to the three Consuls, and then, the insurances would be impossible!

"Christakis will go on board of the 'Cornaro' and see the engineer McGregor himself as soon as the crew are sent off! To-morrow, if he does not send the two officers off to the 'Cornaro,' then the Consuls must interfere and save these men's lives. Ah! To get him only once out at sea with us!" the revengeful woman cried.

It was three hours before Vinton left his strange hostess, and then he eagerly sped away when Chistakis Nicolo came bounding back up the stairway.

"My own boat is back from the 'Cornaro.' All the men are now on board, but our two friends! I will go off to the 'Cornaro' myself, now! You, Agathe, must, in some way, find your way over to Seraglio Point, and bring us back news of Dimitri,

Take one of our boats! And you, Milord, can just follow this fellow Schnorr around Galata. Your friends can spy and easily find him out!"

Howard Vinton was a worn and weary man when he re-entered the Café Gréco at nightfall.

There was no sign of the witch-woman, Agathe, but the impatient Christakis was there and chafing with a glowing excitement. "The 'Cornaro' is sure to sail to-morrow night! Her papers are still with the Russian Consul General! Schnorr is to come on board and to verify the condition of the engines, and later to exhibit the ship and its condition to the local insurance inspectors. Halim Pasha, of course, will be also with him!"

"I know that they have been busied all day with the insurances," cried Vinton, who had been working out his own plans with the English and Russian Legation officers all day.

"Both the English engineers will surely refuse to sail, and demand to be set ashore unless Dimitri is put back in command!" joyously cried Christakis. "It will be all settled to-night!"

"And what must I do?" demanded Vinton.

"You must not let the ship's papers leave the Russian Consul General till we see Dimitri in his proper command. That will frighten this scoundrel, for he will fear the canceling of his insurance. I have sent over a trusty Turk with a letter, in Romaic, to Agathe!

"Come down here to-morrow morning and the time will be ripe for action! He may not go on the ship! If he does not release and pay Dimitri then, he dies like a dog if he stays here! If he goes on the 'Cornaro,' the four officers banded together will be too much for him! Once at sea with them the tables are turned! For they will all make common cause! We must fool him!"

It was nine o'clock in the evening when Ernest Schnorr with a clouded brow left the dinner table of Halim Pasha in the arsenal, and followed an attendant

to the rooms where Corvini and Dimitri Nicolo were detained over the main guard room of the arsenal.

He had sounded all the depths of Halim's villainy and he burned now to revenge himself finally upon the two mutinous servants of "Komanos and Company" to stop their mouths! A woman attendant shuffled down stairs, her face hidden as the burly German climbed the stair. His bitterest enemy had passed his very elbow without a sign.

There was scant courtesy between the three discordant villains! The quarrel of a week was soon taken up and bitterly renewed, until at last Schnorr burst forth in a final rage. "You have both tried to make McGregor and his assistant abandon me here, and leave the ship with no one who knows her engines to take her into the Black Sea. I will give you till the morning to make them recall their disgraceful mutiny, or Halim Pasha will send you both in chains back to Salonique! I have but to go back to him and the chains will go on you to-night!"

Dimitri Nicolo's face then grew purple. "You liar and coward!" he hissed. "If you don't pay Corvini and McGregor as well as myself the money we each earned as profits on the run to London and back, your thieving ship will never leave Stamboul! We know all your swindle about loading the two barks for Tricste! We know what the cargo is in the 'Cornaro,' too. Do you think that I did not know what you meant by cooping us up here as close prisoners? You would sail, and leave us to be strangled in a Turkish prison!"

Schnorr sprang up, foaming. "Let me tell you now that the Greek, the Italian, and the English Consul Generals will know the whole story before noon to-morrow, if you do not pay the money and put us both back on our ship. *The ship's papers are with the Russian Consul General!*"

"If I am not on the ship, in command, at noon, he will hold the papers, the hatches will be opened, and the cargo will be examined, your insurances here will

all be forfeited, and then your ship will never leave Stamboul! And, now, I dare even Halim Pasha to touch a single hair of our heads! I have twenty good friends watching over the 'Alessandro Cornaro.' So, you dog, *you are now in the trap!*"

Ernest Schnorr groaned as he looked at the determined faces of the two desperate men. "Try it on! You cur!" cried Dimitri Nicolo, as the supercargo tried to leave the room.

The two men each drew a loaded revolver, the secret present of the wily Agathe! "Call up Halim Pasha, now. Call him, and we will tell him what waits for you both to-morrow, and he will be the first one called to answer before the three Consuls General!"

"Let us be reasonable," suddenly said Schnorr, quaking in a secret fear. "What will satisfy you?"

"That we be both allowed to go over to Galata to-night as free men," resolutely said the infuriated Greek. "To see our own friends, and at noon we will come alongside the ship. If you are settled with Engineer McGregor then, we will come on board; if you are not, we will just take our chances ashore! We have three messengers from the Consulates all ready to come to-morrow morning and demand us both to be brought to answer at the Consular offices! And then—your ship's papers, you dare not sail without them!"

"If you are lying—" said the baffled Schnorr, in a rage.

"Go and ask McGregor?" cried Dimitri Nicolo. "He is an Englishman and you dare not touch a single hair of his head! *You know it!*"

"I will see Halim," faltered Schnorr.

"You will first go down with us to the shore and put us safely in a boat!" said Nicolo, barring the way, "and then, you can see Halim Pasha. We will come to the ship's side at noon."

"I consent," muttered the quaking Schnorr. "I

will go myself on the 'Cornaro' and soon settle with McGregor."

"He will never settle, till we are back in command! See him!" scornfully laughed Nicolo.

"Come on," cried the crafty schemer. "Go on your ways, I will meet you at the ship!" And when the strange procession reached the strand, a veiled woman strode into the ferry boat and the three left Ernest Schnorr defeated and trembling.

There were hidden foes who slept not in the long night wherein the hostile cohorts of Constantinople's dogs worried each other till dawn. At the British Embassy, Chandos Grahame and the Dragomen of the Russian and English Legations were seated holding a mysterious converse with Howard Vinton.

Midnight found them parting, after making a rendezvous for noon. "You had better remain here, Vinton," said Grahame, "and I will go to the Russian Embassy and hold the ship's papers there till three o'clock. Between noon and three o'clock, your Greek friends will have surely fought out their battle.

"The Russian Dragoman can also go down later with the papers and so put all our party on board! You can go out yourself on the launch! Jack Masterson can come on the Russian launch and so manage to see you. The 'Alessandro Cornaro' must pass the Bosporus in daylight, as she is the largest vessel in the harbor. Now, the Dragoman can remain there on board and go up as far as the mouth at the Black Sea, apparently in charge of the pilgrims. If there is any foul play, he can demand the official detention of the ship by telegraph from the last pratique station. I would then go up there with you, take Masterson and McGregor off, and also save the two officers. The examination of the ship there would prove the facts of the recent fraudulent insurance, and we could have this Ernest Schnorr put under a close arrest, if found here."

"He will be on the ship!" stoutly said Vinton.

"Then, so much the better!" While all slept, the

young American carefully wrote a last letter addressed to Miss Lily Arnot, St. Aubrey's Villa, Southsea. It was a long and eloquent communication. A briefer one, with certain startling news, was addressed to "Captain Enos Drage, Taganrog, Russia, care of the British Consul," and this completed his literary labors. He duly sealed them with care, and then threw himself down to toss until dawn.

Far below him, in the Café Gréco, the released mariner, Dimitri Nicolo, with his brother listened to the very craftiest of plans cunningly devised by Agathe, the Serpent.

"In order to outwit this deadly scoundrel, you must take the Dragomen of the Greek and Italian Consulates to the 'Alessandro Cornaro.' You, Christakis, must be Dimitri's legal witness. One-half of the money for Corvini and you must be paid down to Christakis, and a draft accepted by the insurance broker signed 'by Komanos and Company' given for the remainder.

"This done, in the presence of the two Dragomen, you and Corvini can make a written memorandum of your new engagement as captain and first officer, to take the 'Cornaro' to Taganrog, then to London, and to be paid off in full at London at the expiration of the voyage. When these two men witness the shipping contracts, you both, are far safer than Ernest Schnorr!"

The two men gazed at her in wonder. "And you can then laugh at Halim Pasha, for he will not dare to take you off the 'Cornaro' on her return. His own brother Rustem, and the insurance money would both be endangered. As for the ship's papers and the deck passengers, leave that to me!"

Not another word would she say, but as Christakis left the lovers together, she whispered, "Keep the English Milord away from Dimitri. He might be jealous!"

She smiled in a sinister sweetness. "Bring me word in the morning, and I will meet him away from

here!" Christakis nodded. "Dimitri and I will never fall under these brutes' hands again!" she resolutely said, as she flitted back to her bower.

The fierce-eyed siren had dreamed out a plan to buy an estate near Castro, where Dimitri, her legal husband, would be the lord of an old manor. And the sea, their playground, stretched out there below the cliffs, where the vines, currants and olives ripened in the sun. It was the haunt of their future love!

In Halim Pasha's pleasaunce rooms at the Arsenal, under the shadows of mosque, kiosk, and slender marble minaret, Ernest Schnorr plotted with his sagacious confederate, the Pasha, and the Hebrew insurance agent as go-between. The cautious Jew agent glowered out from under his bushy eyebrows at the two plotters. A dozen schemes of fraud, strategy and murder were thrown aside, one after another. "Better then pay these fellows some money down here and let them take the ship! The two Englishmen are very dangerous! You really need the big engineer!

"Now any outcry here would stop off these policies from completion. The ship's papers would be held and then Lloyds' spies would gather—then—ruin comes to all. I advise you to be pleasant with these men! Make them perfectly easy! When you get back here—it will not be on the 'Cornaro.'" The three wretches laughed, "And then, Halim Pasha can have the sailors mysteriously disappear!

"Let Nicolo be arrested for the old killing. If he is found strangled in prison—*the,—it is a suicide!* The other can, of course, try to escape—and,—*be found later in the Bosporus.*"

The bearded Pasha grinned. "Settle it that way. You two can go to the steamer. I will do my work quickly the very moment I get my hands on Halim, and before the insurances on the ship and cargo are collected!"

The only happy men in the little coterie still bound to the phantom ship were Sandy McGregor and Jack Masterson, lolling easily in the captain's cabin of the

"Alessandro Cornaro." The hardy Jack drank but half the cups which his host filled up as bumpers, and he grinned in delight when McGregor pulled out a chart, and, with an unsteady finger, traced the course of the "Cornaro."

"There's a little joke between Schnorr and I, that will land me a good five thousand, and—I'm blowed —if you go home empty in pocket!"

When McGregor had rolled away to a drunkard's rest, Jack Masterson paced the deck, revolving every means of making a dash to communicate with Vinton. "I dare not risk it to-night. There will be a show to get the news to him to-morrow."

The morning breezes lazily flapped the great white and black flag of the 'Cornaro,' while the circle and K shone out at the mizzen when Howard Vinton briskly strode into the Café Gréco.

Christakis Nicolo drew the visitor quickly aside and told him of the night's occurrences. "Tell Agathe to come to the British Embassy between noon and three. I will have the Russian passengers sent on board only when all is well, and the Dragoman will go up the Black Sea, and come back with a last report as the 'Cornaro' leaves the Bosporus. I must not wait here, and see Dimitri."

The Greek darted up the stairway, and returned with the single sentence scrawled, "I will come to you!" The wise witch kept Dimitri and Vinton apart!

When Ernest Schnorr had finished the morning comedy of his interview with Dimitri Nicolo and Mate Corvini, he bade the reinstated captain spread a feast in the saloon. The swarthy face of Dimitri Nicolo now glowed in triumph, as Christakis hastily sent his launch ashore for a supply of the best the cellars of the Café Gréco afforded. The Dragoman and the insurance broker smiled amiably at the love feast. "To our prosperous voyage!" toasted the supercargo. "I am going on with you myself as a pledge of my renewed confidence." When Christakis Nicolo hastened on shore in his own launch, laden with Dimitri's

grudgingly paid money and the drafts, Ernest Schnorr, with the steamer's cutter, departed to at last obtain the ship's papers. The grimy stokers were already working away far down in the furnace rooms.

There was some surprise in the British Embassy when Howard Vinton secluded himself for an hour with a veiled Turkish woman, who was escorted by that prince of café keepers, Christakis Nicolo! The Greek watched the blue smoke now lazily drifting out from the two great funnels of the "Cornaro," while the young American eagerly whispered with the excited Agathe.

It was four o'clock when he said, "You must go now! Send me word here by Christakis, when the Russian passengers are all embarked! For, your way is clear at last!"

A knock from Grahame had brought the alert Vinton to the door. "The Russian Dragoman has just gone down with Schnorr to the ship now. It is all right!" There were tears in Agathe Mitis' eyes as she rose to leave her stranger friend.

"And, when and where, shall I see you again, you, to whom I owe my life, and Nicolo's freedom?" Vinton smiled peculiarly.

"I shall not be far away, not till you are safely returned! The Embassy secretary will communicate with Christakis."

The woman, with glowing cheeks, threw her arms around him and kissed him with all the wild fervor of her ardent race! Then, proudly lifting her head, she went silently down the stair!

At four o'clock the next morning, the great "Alessandro Cornaro" slowly gathered headway and moved carefully up in the middle thread of the stream toward the great castle of Bala Hissai.

Dimitri Nicolo, on the bridge, forgot for a moment the beautiful woman now hidden in his cabin, and then sharply called to the deck officer, "What's that boat doing alongside?"

"The Russian Legation boat is here with the Drag-

oman and two more of his returning deck passengers!" answered Corvini.

"All right! Three bells! Go ahead!" carelessly answered Dimitri. "I'm mighty glad to have them," he mused. "It will cover any strange happening. They will all tell very different stories!" While the great ship forged slowly along past the superb water palaces of the Sultan, Jack Masterson was crouching at the head of the jacob's ladder.

Below in the boat, Mr. Chandos Grahame was grumbling as he said "good-bye" to his friend Howard Vinton. "By Jove! I don't half like this, old fellow. You take a notion to go out with a lot of cutthroats, and, your life's not worth a pin's fee!"

"Nonsense," cheerily said Howard Vinton. "There are fifteen well-armed Russians smuggled on board under orders of a veteran sub-officer, the secret service man also and a dozen stout pilgrims! There are no arms on the ship but ours. I'll be in hiding—and—I'm doubly armed, with brave old Jack Masterson to protect me! Trust to a Yankee's wit! The serpent woman's also on board, and I should trust to her at the last. It's a forlorn hope, but I'll chance it! Send off my two letters and the three telegrams."

He wrung the staunch Briton's hand and lightly followed the Dragoman up the ladder. With his secret service adjutant, he darted into Jack Masterson's double cabin. "There you are, Master Howard! You can lock both the doors on the inside. The cabin opens through and through! You'll find every thing you need, and I'll come and turn in the very moment we pass out into the Black Sea at eight bells!"

With a last whispered order to the Dragoman, Vinton slipped into his hiding place. Whereat Jack Masterson led the Dragoman at once down into the cabin and then gave him the freedom of his ship with the sub-officer in charge of the Russian passengers!

In the spacious cabin assigned to the mysterious supercargo, Ernest Schnorr was peacefully sleeping. "Wait! Wait!" he murmured. "When this cruise is

over, we will be sent back to Turkish jurisdiction, probably Trebizond! One telegram to Halim Pasha and the trap closes on these two rascally fellows! There will be no evidence then left. The settlement will prove any stories to be wild rumors. McGregor will, of course, keep his mouth shut, for he dares not go back to England!

"They will never suspect the snare that is laid. Other fellows picked up here might have blabbed, and no one will miss these two men! Halim Pasha will soon take care of that!"

The great ship passed slowly by the wonderful panorama of the castle-crowned banks of the beautiful Bosporus. Fort and barrack, kiosk and villa, splendid gardens, tower-crowned cliffs and picturesque villages nestling in shady nooks, or crowning the richly verdured shores! It was eight o'clock when the last batteries were passed, and dipping the flag to the guardian forts, the great "Cornaro" stole out under the ruin of the old Genoese castle, past the bald brown headland with its entrenched camp on the European shore, and plunging into a dense fog bank, rose and fell uneasily in the rough rolling waves of the open wastes of the harsh Euxine Sea! The phantom ship was creeping along on her last mysterious cruise!

CHAPTER XIV

WRECKED ON SERPENT ISLAND!—THE TRANSFORMED PASSENGERS!—HOWARD VINTON UNMASKED!—A SCHEME DEFEATED!—THE SHIP'S PAPERS!—THE FRIENDLY FLAMES!—THE EXPLOSION!—VALE KOMANOS AND COMPANY!

Howard Vinton's disturbed slumbers were at last broken by the entrance of Jack Masterson, all grimy in his working clothes. The disguised companion of

Vinton's secret guest admitted the chief stoker and sauntered out to give his own instructions to the armed Russian pilgrims.

In the cold drenching Scotch mist, the hardy Russians were huddled around the shelter nooks of the decks, and good-humoredly chaffing a half-dozen stout hearted Muscovite women who had washed their all-trifling sins away in the Jordan. The huge ship labored heavily against the nasty head sea blown up on the shallows of the tideless Euxine!

"Are we safe here, Jack?" whispered the American.

"There's no one to bother," answered Masterson. "Corvini has the chart room cabin! The skipper has his own, and that beastly Dutch Jew has the main cabins to himself."

"Where's the Greek woman?" anxiously demanded Vinton.

"She's a regular will-o'-the-wisp! She's been all over the ship, rigged up in her Turkish costume. Nicolo is down there colloquing with Schnorr. Corvini has the ship and is on the bridge! So, no one can overhear us!" The blasts from the bleak Chersonese began to loudly whistle and then hum away in the loosened rigging, as the "Alessandro Cornaro" dragged along with slow sullen plunges.

"The old man has just ordered half speed, and that, with the headwind, just gives us about steerage way. Blow me if a good roller comes, the old bark may go under. She's pretty well strained. Now, Master Howard, I've told the steward to bring my breakfast in to the other cabin. I'll let him in! All you have to do is just to firmly hook the inside door! Keep the outer one securely locked and so eat your meal in peace! We will talk things over there!"

Vinton dressed and mused over the situation as he discussed the ample meal. He was now the secret general of the disciplined men smuggled on board to insure the honest carrying out of the voyage. Serge Zotoff, the Russian Consul General's military aide, was a stern soldier, who knew every corner of the "hospi-

table sea." He had been often a dispatch bearer on the "Volunteer Fleet," and hence he knew every headland of the "Pontus Euxinus." The agreement of the Russian and English Ambassadors that "barratry" could be legally resisted by force, was the warrant for Zotoff's use of the force commanded by him.

For, the Legation bags, as well as a full Russian mail, was intrusted to the Turkish tramp steamer, sailing legally under the sanction of the Russian clearances for Taganrog!

The subaltern had his carefully written orders, too, to justify him, and the Governor of the Don Provinces was already warned by telegram to Taganrog. Zotoff alone knew of the discretionary powers vested in Howard Vinton by the two Ambassadors. The fifteen men heavily armed with two revolvers each, and formidable Circassian daggers, could easily overpower the mongrel crew at need. There had been full time to arrange for all emergencies in the dim watches of the night. Zotoff was the lynx-eyed guardian of the decks, and, at the first signal of the unusual he was ready to rally his men and come dashing to Vinton's aid.

"Remember," said the American. "The two officers, Sandy McGregor, the big engineer, and, above all, Schnorr, the supercargo, are the first ones to be seized!" "I will attend to the Jew, with one determined man. Two men each will handle the other officers. Five men will be told off to keep the crew below, under my sergeant, and the corporal with the other five will join you here! Of course, our compatriot passengers will aid us. There's about a score of them, all told, and good loyal fellows, too."

The American long pondered alone, over the unknown designs of Schnorr. "He will not dare to burn or destroy the ship! He dare not change the course! For, the Russian clearances must be obeyed. What is his new crafty scheme? Some adroit mercantile swindle at Taganrog probably. Storing the goods, getting advances, then burning the ware-

houses! Or, perhaps, burning the ship at Taganrog, in the very roads. He can make the game to suit."

He reviewed the facts that Fitzgerald at Smyrna, Higginbotham at London, Captain Enos Drage and the British Consul at Taganrog, now knew that he was the leader of the concealed guard of the "richest cargo of the Levant."

But, two of his friends he had intentionally deceived! Jack Masterson only knew that his friend, secreted in the stoker's double cabin, would be a legal witness of the seizure of the "Cornaro" at Taganrog!

And, Agathe Mitis was in the dark, as she had been herself smuggled on the tramp steamer, to join her lover as a Moslem woman. He dared now to trust her in nothing. For that mad love, that same insane passion, which led her to brave death for Dimitri Nicolo, would perhaps thwart him in the hour of victory.

The blue eyes of the sweet English girl waiting for him at Southsea seemed to shine out of the gray fog mists of the "Mauri Thalassa!" "Agathe must not know my plans till the denouement! Then, I can perhaps win Nicolo over to make a clean breast of the whole thing, and protect him, too. But Jack Masterson must watch every movement of these four conspirators, for his own life and mine would be forfeit in any sudden fracas!" so the American decided. "Zotoff dare not act until they commit themselves!" Vinton arose and seeing all his arms in readiness, lit a cigar and watched Jack Masterson at his slumbers. It was near noon when the wearied Jack awoke.

"Now, my boy, look sharp!" said Howard Vinton. "Your life and mine depend upon your zeal now! I shall not go out until night! Then, I can easily mingle with the motley crowd in the forward deck with no fear of discovery. I've got a Turk's full garb here. I bought out an old beggar of a Dervish for twenty piastres and left him just as naked as he was born! You must closely watch the log book, the chart, and also keep your eye on Sandy McGregor! If the

course is slightly changed, then come to me at once. You can easily watch the compass! I'll stay here hidden all day! To-night I'll keep an eye on the decks."

"All right, Master Howard!" said the sturdy Jack. "I'm well armed. If there's any shindy, count on McGregor and I, for Sandy would not see any harm come to you. I'll put his life in bail for that!"

And the long day wore away, as the chill breezes whistled and the Turkish passengers prayed to the Prophet, and objurgated the unruly waste of waters known to them as the "Kara Deniz."

Out on the sloppy decks the devoted Russians gloated over the coming time when the blue and white cross would rule the "Tschernoje More," following the will of the great Peter and the pointing finger of that royal Messalina, Catherine, great in her loves and hates, and whose ample bosom glowed with patriotic fires, as well as all a loving woman's burning frenzy!

Serge Zotoff, with his triple knock, stealthy signal of warning, soon returned to report Schnorr and the two officers lingering in an earnest conference in the chart room. The two friends waited and watched lying perdu while the deeply laden tramp bored along with sullen plunges, the gray fog banks wrapping her course, and the mournful, hollow scream of the fog horn accentuating her wind swept progress over the freshening billows.

"How long should be our voyage to Taganrog, Zotoff?" said Vinton. "About four days, at a usual slow rate of speed, but, it looks as if this boat might need five or six." "Then nothing can happen till we near the straits of Kertsch! For, I never knew a Hebrew who cared to be drowned! But, watch every moment, for there's no second chance for us! If these fellows should get to the boats first we would be left powerless!"

"Ah! Excellence!" grimly said Zotoff. "My men have their orders to shoot the first man who touches a tackle without my own order. There have been a

dozen shipwrecks on the Euxine where the crew cruelly left the poor passengers to drown, in the last five years! Trust to my Russians!"

And, the watchful secret agent cautiously departed to keep his outside guard. Entrenched in the chart room, Supercargo Ernest Schnorr sat long studying the outspread chart with the greatest care, while Tomas Corvini faithfully walked the bridge, and the watchful Greek captain eagerly stole away to join Agathe Mitis, at the little repast spread in his own cabin.

The English engineer had joined in the long discussion of the morning whereat the three seamen were astonished at the minute knowledge possessed by the German Hebrew supercargo of all the marine topography of the Euxine.

Schnorr had questioned them closely as to Odessa, Kherson, Eupatoria, and all the Muscovite borders of the Black Sea! Left alone, he studied long and examined the hourly progress of the boat as laid down upon the chart! The landsman was strangely expert with protractor, parallel rules, and dividers!

He had finished all his secret cogitations before the secretly happy Dimitri Nicolo returned. "I must act before nightfall!" the crafty manager of Komanos and Company decided at last. "There are these Russians on board and they sharp witted enough! I did not dare to refuse them passage backed up by their authorities! I may even yet need the good will of the Russian Consul General, when, when all is over! We must act before midnight! It would never do to pass this one place! That would be a fatal error! It seems to be as if nature had designed it purposely for my present needs, and, there can be only a half dozen men there."

"Yes! I must get Capitano Nicolo into a good humor!"

When the Captain reappeared, Ernest Schnorr led him below and began his wily schemes over a bottle of the best champagne. The Greek was now keenly

on the defensive, for, he knew now all the villainy of his tyrant employer.

"Now, that you are over your blinding craze for that Greek woman you lost, I can talk cold business to you, Dimitri!" said Schnorr. "You have been perfectly unmanageable! We are clear of all the sneaking insurance spies now! I was afraid to trust you at Smyrna, and even at Stamboul! Caspari told me that you acted like a wild man about her! Just you stay by me now, and I will have her hunted up for you, by and by." Schnorr was clumsily caressing now, in his oily manner.

"What could she do to harm you?"sullenly said the doubtful Greek! "Ah! You forget that you have lost three ships in the last five years! A lover often brags to the ruling woman of his heart! I have an idea that our Van Lennep has just spirited her away to make some charges against poor Bouclair, and later, attack 'Komanos and Company!' For he beat her like a dog at Smyrna, that fool of a Frenchman, after you sailed away for London!"

Dimitri Nicolo sprang to his feet in a wild rage. The woman whom he adored had hidden her shame from him. Schnorr's oily voice ran on evenly. "Everyone knew it of course at the Hotel Huck! Now, these fellows all have money! They may perhaps have bribed her to clear out, and to let some fellow into his rooms just to put Bouclair out of the way! He had a great roulette party there, and there was over a thousand pounds to the credit of the bank, so I am told. Emile was the banker! You know what Greek roulette is!" Nicolo grinned.

"Now, Caspari would not let me trust to you, or to Corvini, nor even to the Big Inglese at Smyrna, for we were watched there all of us, watched night and day! He was afraid of the woman hanging around to delude you or your two friends! Remember, you've already lost three ships, your reputation is bad. Now, we are alone, you and I! I will have the woman hunted up, but no one must know this trick out here

but you and I! We can settle with the other two men here when we reach land! But, you and I, must do the job together, and, we must have a good excuse for the disaster." Dimitri Nicolo bluntly said: "So! You only played rough with me to throw the Big Inglese and Corvini off their guard?"

"Yes! McGregor always drinks too much to depend on him, and you know it!" "They would kill me if I betrayed them—it would not do!" doubtfully said Nicolo, now measuring his man well. "Better let me have their share to keep for them, then, I can square with them! What do you wish me to do?"

"Come up to the chart room now, and I'll show you," whispered Ernest Schnorr, turning pale, as he hastily drained a stiff glass of neat brandy. "It must be done—now or never!"

Dimitri Nicolo followed the burly supercargo, as a panther creeps up on the careless hunter. "Now, speak out! No childish nonsense," said Nicolo, as Schnorr bent over the chart. The supercargo glanced at the chronometer. "Where are we now, tell me to the hair?" he demanded. "I want that, and the distance to that point, and, you must lay off the course to reach it!"

Dimitri Nicolo bent to his work now with triumphantly glowing eyes! He began to see the scoundrel's neatly laid plot! In five minutes he placed a pin firmly on the line of the ship's path and handed a slip of paper to the watchful Hebrew, whose eyes shone like blazing blue stars from under his shaggy eyebrows. "I want you to plant us *there*," he said, holding a dividers' point upon a little mark a mere speck on the chart of the Euxine.

"At daybreak to-morrow, you must be in command, and no one but you must ever know this secret! Think over how you can do it!" Dimitri Nicolo was startled at the supercargo's bold proposition. "Who gave you this idea?" he flatly demanded.

"Our Odessa correspondent came over to Smyrna and we fixed it all up there! He was to get me a

trusty commander if you were not available! Caspari had him come over, for that wretch Bouclair had sworn to either kill you or get Rustem Pasha to have you arrested and strangled in prison, when you returned."

"Why?" growled the Greek. "To have that witch woman, Agathe the Serpent, all to himself! He was jealous as a fool, and some younger swain of the roulette party may have played on the woman's fears and then killed him, for the same fool's reason! To have the woman all to himself! Now, our Odessa correspondent has been told his whole plan! He is ready to cover us in all! He gets a share of the brokerage on the insurance! He is the brother of our Stamboul man!"

"See here," said Nicolo. "You should have trusted me and told me all, at Stamboul! It's too late! I left my money ashore! I will not fall into strange hands without money! You bullied me in Stamboul! I don't care to be caught and to starve in a Russian prison."

"Listen! You mad Greek!" said Schnorr. "Have you not got our whole insurance money tied up by our secret compact? I have thought of all! I am ready to take care of you, now!" "What do I get for the job?" the Captain asked with glittering eyes!

"Here is a thousand pounds each in good Bank of England notes, one thousand for you, for 'Big Ingles,' and for Corvini! The money is to be put in your hands! And, no one but myself and you are to be on deck at daybreak. Can you do it? You see I need these fellows as witnesses!"

"I can land her there within half an hour of the almanac sunrise!" said Nicolo. "What excuse have we to give?"

"The currents of the Black Sea, the steady head wind, the fog, and the local deviations of the compasses! We must swear they were out of order! The ship was not swung for compass adjustment at Smyrna! The stupid Turks took her out, and, Rustem

Pasha will of course throw all the fault on the sub-ordinates! That's all we want. And the sub-officers will swear us through!"

The two rascals' heads were close together as they whispered long over a neat plan to effect their double purpose. "I could have told you all this at Stamboul, but, I feared those two other men, and that woman devil Agathe! I was afraid that she would twist herself around you at Stamboul, for Caspari thinks that the Captain of the 'Apollo' took her away! She may be there now. He is as madly her slave as any of the rest of you! If she only knew you were in Stamboul, she might have betrayed us all to the Austrian Captain and—these Lloyds fellows would give him half the price of a ship to break us up. You can never trust a woman in love. You can keep all the money, if you want to! They need not ever know, if you work alone! They will get their share later. We can pay them out of the shares of those fellows at home who take no risk, and are now safe in Smyrna, while we are in danger of death or prison!"

"It's just the thing to do," growled Nicolo. "Give them five hundred apiece extra, and then leave this three thousand to me."

"All right!" said Schnorr. "Go ahead! I will give you the money when you rouse me at four o'clock!"

"See here! Schnorr!" sharply cried Dimitri Nicolo as he flashed a keen blade at the Hebrew's throat. "No foolery now, in this! You will die by this knife, if you flinch! I am putting a rope around my neck just for you!"

"You idiot! Would I throw a hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds away; a half year's work, too?" cried Schnorr! "To the dogs with all your threats! Your love nonsense has made all the trouble!"

"Then, get out, and let me do my work! I'll call you at four o'clock! and, I want to see the money before you come on deck!" the Greek cried, as he put up his useless knife. "I will take the dog watch, and privately fix all the compasses, when Corvini

goes below now. The steersmen then will never know the trick, they will swear straight."

There was no response but a nod of approval and then, the able Captain Dimitri Nicolo nimbly proceeded to some earnest and recondite calculations, when he had carefully locked the doors. In half an hour, he was fully satisfied! "Yes, that will just make it!" Nicolo grinned. "Half speed, and due north, instead of the regular northeast course for Kertsch!" Unlocking a drawer, he now carefully examined a half dozen small steel bars, with sharp points inserted in one side! Opening one of the two standard compasses he carefully eyed the ship's true course, which was due northeast, and then affixed the first steel bar under one card, moving it until the northeast point of one exactly corresponded with the *due north* of the other!

In ten minutes more, the second compass was adjusted and the two steel bars fastened under each trembling needle.

When the light fingered Greek had finished his work, each compass indicated *due north!* He quietly locked the door of the chart room, and bore with him a pair of dividers set to a distance carefully measured upon the brass upper rim of the compass boxes.

The decks were sloppy and deserted in the falling mist, and the pilgrims were sheltered in every nook from the storm as Captain Nicolo found his way to the bridge. "I'll take the dog watch, Tomasso!" he cried as the mate left the bridge. With a few growling comments on the weather, the Captain entered the bridge house where a brawny quartermaster was leaning over the wheel! Nicolo gazed out at the growing blackness of the night! The wild surges flashed by fang-like in their fierce whiteness and the wind moaned in the loosened rigging. Nicolo turned to the quartermaster suddenly. "Go down and get me a cup of 'café negra!'" he sharply said. "Tell the steward to give you a dash of brandy in it! I'll take the wheel!"

The seaman nodded and clattered down the stairs. It was the work of a moment for the Captain to lift the compass card! The dividers set to a hair, measured his point, and in a moment, the steel bar affixed with its sharp point, drew the suspended card needle to its false rest. "There now! you old tub, we will hear from you, about daylight." As he held the ship firmly on her altered course, the Captain gayly drank his coffee, and then resigned his wheel to the steersman.

When he had finished his coffee, he noted the log, and carefully examined the chronometer. "Va Bene!" he cried. "It's a nasty night, keep her on due north-east all night!" and he clanged his bell to diminish speed. When big Sandy McGregor had finished setting the engines, he came puffing up to the bridge.

"She is only crawling along now," he said, eyeing the Greek narrowly "I don't wish her to labor with this dead weight cargo!" the Greek replied, as Corvini returned for the keys of the chart room cabin.

"Not a soul of them can fix this thing on me!" mused Nicolo. "The north east card course is really due north now, and it would land her straight in Odessa Harbor in twenty hours. But, she'll never get there," he laughed—"she'll never get there! I know where to lay her up, now!"

There were few of the four score souls on board the "Cornaro" who wandered on the wild night around the slippery decks, as the giant tramp steamer slowly forged along with her fog horn blowing at two minute intervals. Serge Zotoff uneasily pacing the port side, kept his eyes fixed upon his sergeant walking the starboard decks. There was now a murky closeness in the air, and not a star was visible. "Just the very night for dirty work." the Russian growled. But, one hooded stranger rambled over the steamer, with Jack Masterson lingering near him from time to time to furtively exchange a few words.

"I can't make this thing out." the chief stoker whispered. "Here Nicolo has got his own pretty bird on board in hiding, and yet he seems now cheek by

jowl with that brute Schnorr; but, he is easily hoodwinked. Old Sandy McGregor is down below making a night of it with the Dutchman! And, the woman is running free, skipping around in her convenient Turkish rig. So, look out that she don't speak to you as a real Turk. She would perhaps raise a row, and tell Dimitri and we would be soon discovered! You had better go in the cabin with your man!"

"I'll drop in on Corvini; he might have a little love story of his own; a bit of a flirtation in the chart room, while the 'old man' is on the bridge. For these Russian women are very amiable—strangely so, in fact."

"Have you looked at the log book every hour?" anxiously said Vinton. "I will go up now!" said Jack Masterson. "I'm watching the course all the while by the extra compass in my room! They've given me the first officer's room, as there is no second, and the extra instruments are there." While the men spoke a lithe womanly figure bore down upon them. It was Agathe Mitis, bird of night, who recognized the flowing robes of a Dervish. All that Jack Masterson could do was to clumsily rescue his imperiled friend, who gravely made a sign of silence as the woman gayly accosted him, and hastened to his room in dismay, locking the door, while the old man o' war's man freely caressed the lonely Moslem beauty, who laughingly escaped. Vinton was indeed an "unspeakable Turk." Howard Vinton was joined by Zotoff, whom Jack Masterson sent at once to guard his suspected friend.

"My men are all watchful, and five of them on duty, will rouse the other five every four hours!" said Zotoff. "I feel danger near, I have a presentiment that something will soon happen!"

There was a crash of Jack Masterson's door as the Russian spoke, and, in a moment, the communicating door was thrown open.

"Quick! Quick!" cried Jack to Howard Vinton! "Here is the very deuce to pay!" He stood glaring

at Zotoff whose converse with Vinton was carried on in the Russian's second nature language, the cosmopolitan Gallic tongue. Making a sign to Zotoff to wait, Vinton sprang through the opening and closed the door between the two cabins. "What is up?" demanded Vinton, his hand seeking his pistol butt. "This skunk of a Dutchman is going to beach her somewhere *soon,* Master Vinton," said the excited Masterson.

"Look here!" He threw back the lid of the old-fashioned compass box. "There's our real course! *Due north!* And that course, will put us dead on shore somewhere in the Crimea!"

"How do you know?" said the American, his heart wildly beating. "I have verified the course in the chart room, on the bridge, and here, every hour, just as you bade me; and I have copied off every entry on the log!

"Our sailing course is a straight slant due northeast from the mouth of the Bosporus to strike the straits of Kertsch! An hour ago, at eight bells, the course was secretly changed, and Captain Nicolo has done it! I've been into the chart room! The two compasses there mark due northeast! The bridge compass also marks due northeast, and the log, too, shows a northeast course. They are working on a false course and *have fixed the compasses!*

"Now, as we are running on dead reckoning in this fog, and I don't know where we turned off our proper course, I can only say that we will run dead ashore in the Crimea, certainly by to-morrow night! He is, of course, fooling the crew, so as to have the sailors' evidence!"

"Is he not going to secretly land the cargo on the Crimea, and then destroy the ship afterwards?" said the mystified Vinton. "No! He is going to beach her, and just let her break up! Wait here and watch that compass card! If it moves from due north, let me know! I thought the wind had shifted at eight bells!

"It was really the 'old man' changing the course! He sent the steersman slyly down below! I was watching my chance to see the log book! I'll just steal up now, and see all three compasses!"

While Jack Masterson was away, Vinton called Zotoff to his side. The story was soon told. "Let no one know that you are ready—above all this man Masterson!" continued Vinton. "But at the first sign of trouble, we must be all of us ready to take the ship!"

When Jack Masterson returned, he had verified the stratagem of Nicolo. "Now! I dare not yet post old McGregor!" said Jack. "Corvini takes the bridge at midnight, and then holds his watch till eight bells! I will be out on deck at four o'clock myself, and watch Captain Nicolo, who takes the early dog watch! There's old Sandy, now, drinking away with Schnorr. This is a little private scheme of Nicolo and Schnorr! For these other fellows evidently don't know!"

"What are we to do?" cried Howard Vinton, in anxiety. "You and your man can just watch here till four o'clock, when I will take the deck! The Captain himself gave me orders for slow steam all night! I'll turn in, but all dressed and ready to act. There's no land that we could hit before late to-morrow night! Corvini is asleep in the chart room! The Captain's friend has disappeared! We are all snug for the night! He has changed both the speed and the course to-night and knows to a hair just where he will land her! Oh! What a sly boy is Dimitri! I'll grab McGregor, if anything happens, and, with you and I and my own stokers, we will have the first boat all to ourselves!"

Two vigilant men, armed to the teeth, crawled around the decks at intervals till the tired Corvini had ended his watch. For midnight found both Ernest Schnorr and McGregor in their bunks, while honest Jack Masterson rested until he would be called up to dog his treacherous commander.

Howard Vinton lay down as the bronze bells rang

out four o'clock, and was roused, in the early growing light of the dawn, by Jack Masterson's grasp upon his arm. "Get up! There's something I can't understand here!" sharply said Jack, who was buckling on his belt and pistols. "This fellow Schnorr has been carefully roused, and he is hidden away up there on the bridge with the Captain, and McGregor and Corvini, too, are together in the chart room.

"As I came by the skipper's cabin, moreover, I saw the 'mysterious lady passenger,' all dressed! *This means something!* I'll have the truth out of McGregor! I'm going down to warn my two head stokers! We'll have a chance with the best! I've got a signal agreed on with them, already! We are not going to be left to roast or drown down in that furnace room!" The crisis was evidently near! Howard Vinton was on his feet in an instant, and a few stern words brought Zotoff to his side. "I will go and keep an eye out! For Heaven's sake, just wait for me here!" said the bewildered Masterson.

Before he had closed the door, Zotoff was gone, crawling along the starboard railing! The gray fog wrapped the greasy heaving waves, and the wind of the night before had died away!

"All my men are now warned and ready!" said Zotoff, as he found Vinton waiting at the loosened door. "Two of the men are ready outside, and the Russian Hourra is to be the rallying cry! Now, Vinton, when you want me to take the ship, say so! The responsibility is yours, but, I *will do the work!*"

There was suddenly the sound of trampling feet, and then, a wild cry rang out as Howard Vinton, pistol in hand, dashed out of the door. The sharp crack of a revolver sounded on the morning air, and its answer was a ringing Russian "Hourra!"

For, booming out of the fog bank ahead, the hoarse murmur of breakers was heard above all, and to right and left, a brown rocky hill rose up before them!

There was a grating sound a grinding, jarring

shock that threw every one upon their knees, and then Serge Zotoff dashed forward, pistol in hand!

"Come on, Vinton! We are betrayed!" he cried. A dozen grimy stokers rallied around Jack Masterson, as, with a last shuddering quiver the "Alessandro Cornaro" drove her sharp bow full fifty feet into the yielding sands of a little bay.

There was a rush, and fierce faces were confronting the two frightened scoundrels on the bridge, as the Russians with drawn pistols barred their descent!

"Secure Corvini and McGregor!" yelled Vinton to the astounded Masterson. "Bring them here! Zotoff, guard all the starboard boats! *This ship is mine, now!*"

The astounded crew were clambering down the port side and dropping into the surf, trying to reach the shore by swimming and on ropes hastily thrown overboard. The hissing steam now roared out, as the stern of the ship began to settle and twist. "Loosen the escape valve!" yelled Vinton. Zotoff was at Vinton's side.

"Bring those two men down here, and now lower the starboard boats! Let the starboard gangway fall!" A couple of sturdy Russians soon dragged the speechless Nicolo and Schnorr, now white with rage, down from the bridge.

"Tie their hands!" cried Vinton. "Now, Mr. McGregor," sharply commanded the American, "you and this second officer can get the whole ship's company safely ashore!"

"Who are you?" roared Ernest Schnorr, as he felt the cords tighten on his wrists. "You will find out, soon enough!" grimly cried the man who had suddenly appeared to mar forever the neatly laid plot of Komanos and Company.

"Here, Jack!" ordered Vinton. "Take the Captain along and let him direct the men in launching the boats! Look out for that Turkish lady! Now, Zotoff, have your men shoot anyone who gets into a boat without my order! Where are we?"

The Russian pointed in the growing dawn to two low white buildings crowning the highest hill of the saddle-shaped island, into whose little sandy bay some strange chance had led the doomed "Alessandro Cornaro."

"This is Serpent's Island, Excellence," said the Russian. "We Russians call it Adassi. There is the lighthouse and the blue and white cross flying! We can easily signal an Odessa steamer and then, we can all be taken off!"

Masterson now approached Vinton, chivalrously leading by the hand the downcast Agathe. The forward half of the ship was most firmly fixed in the sand and the stern was slowly twisting and careening as all the boats were skillfully floated and ranged alongside. Half the ship's company were already on shore, and the remainder were now scrambling down the side, on a shifted Jacob's ladder. With all due deliberation, Zotoff was debarking the Russian deck passengers.

"Is there no danger of an explosion?" demanded Vinton of McGregor. "She's broken in two, and besides, the fires are all out now!" sullenly said the half-sobered Scotchman. "The steam pressure is off! The valve is open. This is a rum go! Who the deuce are you? A land pirate, I'll be bound, anyhow!"

Howard Vinton's only answer was to lead the astonished Agathe Mitis aside. There was an agony in her eyes which touched him.

"Trust to me!" he said. "Call Dimitri to you. Tell him, in Greek, to obey me in all things! I will set him free! You and he will not suffer! There is my enemy—that brute Schnorr! If Dimitri speaks to no one but you and remains at my side—you shall soon see the star of fortune smile on you!"

"And so—you have deceived me all along!" she said. "To run this scoundrel and thief to earth at last! Let me deal with him! Wait and trust me!" Then, with a wave of his hand, Vinton called Nicolo back to his side. "You will report to Captain Zotoff

and now land under his orders! Agathe will explain." "Where in heaven did you come from?" "I have only been a passenger of yours, but without your knowledge! Remember now! Obey Zotoff!" The Greek was but too willing.

And Howard Vinton then turned away to give a last order to the two men in charge of the crestfallen Ernest Schnorr.

"See here, Zotoff! Tell your two Russians here to gag this fellow if he attempts to talk, and *to shoot him if he tries to escape!*"

The burly German schemer sank to his knees, cowering down in an abject despair. "Get up, you brute! we must all now get off the ship!" said Vinton, as Zotoff went off in a boat to meet the captain of the light-house guard, who appeared on the cliffs wildly gesticulating.

"You had better save all the supplies you can!" said Vinton to Nicolo, now no longer captain. "As soon as everyone is off the ship, Captain Zotoff will give you the whole force to aid you. We must not be left to starve!"

And, still sternly guarding his prisoner on the spray-drenched forecastle, Howard Vinton watched the stern of the great liner settle, inch by inch, under the oily waves, as the vessel's back was broken by the lifting and pounding of the stern still floating. In ten minutes the Russian officer in command stood there on the forecastle deck with the young American commander. "You must hasten to do all you can to save beds, food and supplies!" yelled the Russian. "If this wind changes, she will be dashed in pieces before to-morrow night!"

He approached Vinton with the most cordial greetings, for Captain Zotoff had already warned the astute Russian of the nature of his morning visitors, and the strange end of the run to Taganrog.

"We will need your official witness of all our later proceedings," said Zotoff, "and here is our warrant!"

He showed the Consul-General's orders with the blue Government seal.

"Command me in all things!" answered the old light-house keeper. Captain Basileffsky was a grizzled veteran of Sebastopol who had ruled the barren brown double-humped island, a menace to the commerce of the Danube, since the sly Russians occupied it in Crimean war days. "I can signal to the passing Odessa steamers, also those for Stamboul! I have already hung out my distress signals!"

He pointed to the Turkish and Russian ensigns, hung upside down on the mast stepped on the summit of the largest of the two stone houses which with the light-house made up the only edifices on the bleak, brown islet of two hundred acres.

"You had better send all the Moslems back to Stamboul, and take the other passengers and the ship's company on to Odessa! This island is in the direct course to Odessa! You were forty-five degrees *to the northward* of your true course!"

Howard Vinton started! The evidence of crime must not be lost! He called Jack Masterson and bade him secure the three loaded compasses, and to save the standard one from his room. "Captain!" said Vinton, "I wish to confine this man under guard, and have him kept in an absolute silence!"

In ten minutes, Zotoff's corporal with one of Basileffsky's men were guarding the sullen Schnorr in a room of the light-house storehouse. A couple of sails were set up as tents ashore, and, before sunset, the whole ship's company was on shore, with the able-bodied men divided in gangs, rescuing all the supplies and portable property of value.

Captain Nicolo and Corvini, with McGregor, were in charge of working gangs on shore, while Jack Masterson and Zotoff handled the salvage of the ship,—the old Captain Basileffsky commanding on the island, and Howard Vinton, standing on the forecastle, was the unexplained dictator of the mysterious seizure.

An armed squad of Zotoff's men grimly patrolled

the sheltered bay where the four-score souls were obliged to encamp, and a strong guard watched over the broken-hulled ship, whose decks were now rent apart in front of the engines. The "Cornaro's" last run was over!

By sunset, great blazing fires lit up the sheltered bay, and, the labors of the day over, the marooned voyagers were eagerly experimenting in co-operative cookery. When Howard Vinton left the ship for the first time, it was to join Zotoff, Jack Masterson and the Russian light-house keeper at the old captain's hospitable table. Fate and fortune seemed to have favored Madame Agathe, whose striking beauty was the wonderment of Captain Basileffsky's matronly Cossack wife!

"We must have a council of war and divide our duties!" said Vinton to Zotoff, after the dinner had given way to the vodki bottle and cigars. It was soon arranged that the three leading mutineers should inspect the wreck and the encampment at intervals during the night. Howard Vinton "personally visited" Mr. Ernest Schnorr to verify his proper treatment as to food and lodging. The debased swindler plucked Vinton by the sleeve.

"Let me go! Let me get away on the first passing steamer! I will make your fortune! I can get gold at Odessa! You will be rewarded like a prince!" The American turned with a sneer. "You brute! Do you think I am a dog of your own breed? You shall have justice, nothing more—nothing less!"

The American passed on into the room where the beautiful Agathe sat wondering at Vinton's sudden appearance as the leader of an organized band. He had left Schnorr, now a heap of abject misery, huddled up on his couch. "The time has now come, Agathe!" said the young man kindly, "for Nicolo to make a clean breast of all the operations of Komanos and Company! I cannot tell you all, but I pledge you my honor that you and he shall be held harmless!

"I want the whole story of this scheme from the

very first! Another will soon come and take charge here, as soon as a steamer passes to Odessa, but I shall keep all the principal people here till this strange mystery is cleared up! I want the whole ship's papers —all the documents—and Dimitri Nicolo's evidence, taken before the Russian authorities at Odessa! I will send him to you now! When you are ready to talk, send for me! To-morrow two steamers will pass, and there will only be a dozen of us left here to-morrow night! Will you trust me? I will tell you all later! Tell Nicolo that he must manage to live under British protection after this, for Smyrna would only be his graveyard—if he ever ventured there!"

Agathe nodded her approval. "I will do as you wish. I never wish to see the accursed hole again!" cried the cowering woman. "They would have cruelly murdered Nicolo on his return! He knows it, only you must protect us against this brute villain, this Schnorr! He is the tool and spy of Rustem and Halim Pashas!" "I will soon clip these Pashas' claws! Never fear!" said Vinton, as he rejoined his friends.

When the American had briefly sketched his proposed operations, he filled his listeners with admiration of his practical mind.

"My object is to convict this fellow Schnorr and to forfeit all the insurances on this ship and the cargo. To confiscate the two valuable cargoes sent on to Trieste, and to break up this thieving gang forever; to punish the confederates at Smyrna and Constantinople, and to blacklist all the insurers who have heretofore transferred their fraudulent insurances to Komanos and Company.

"Now the two officers of the ship and the engineer will see their easy way to immediate safety by a full confession. I want, however, absolute legal evidence of the criminal deviation of the voyage; of the plot to cast the ship away on this lonely island!

"Schnorr evidently counted on your small force, Captain Basileffsky, and so proposed to overawe you and destroy all legal evidence of wrong doing. I wish

to send the Sergeant over to Stamboul with dispatches to the British and Russian Ministers!

"The Corporal can go to Odessa with dispatches to the British Consul! For, London, Smyrna, Trieste, and Taganrog must all be notified of this startling event by cipher dispatches to our Consul. Then, keeping all the principals here till Captain Drage returns, I think that I will be able to make a clear case before the authorities in Odessa!

"Of course, the insurances will be duly declared forfeited at Stamboul, but, we have the villain's plunder to capture at Trieste! Ernest Schnorr must not be allowed to speak until he is arraigned before the Russian authorities. I will be there with Captain Drage and the British Consul at Odessa as prosecutors!

"Now let us have a careful look at all the compasses!"

In five minutes, the whole trick was apparent! Jack Masterson's telltale standard compass closely agreed with the light keeper's standard! The cards of the other three were lifted up and exposed the little steel bars affixed to the bottom of the cases, and still showing a uniform deviation of forty-five degrees to the northward.

"Get the Captain to voluntarily confess this, and you have Mr. Ernest Schnorr and Komanos and Company ruined! But, we must to-morrow heave out full samples of all the false cargo, and then have Captain Basileffsky seal them all in our presence!"

"Yes," said the old Russian, setting down his vodki glass and going to the double window. "The wind is changing, the chop sea is rolling up, to-morrow night will grind the 'Alessandro Cornaro' to pieces, and all we will then have to show will be her bow stuck in the sand. Last year, an English tramp came ashore here on the rocky point, at full speed, and she broke in two, hanging half on dry land!

"And another of the sea-bandits left his boat with half her length high and dry on the driveway before

Bala Hissar Palace in the Bosporus! This thing was most neatly done!

"The Greek Captain landed the 'Cornaro' within a half hour of daybreak, and just in the sandy cove. He had prepared all very neatly."

When it was agreed that the Russian commander should officially ship off the commoner herd at once as wards of the Russian authorities in Stamboul and Odessa, Howard Vinton grasped Jack Masterson's horny hand in triumph. "You have saved the day, old fellow! I'll see you squared up at Southsea, and Mary Horton shall have a 'setting out' that will open your eyes! I want you to watch Schnorr carefully to-night! Don't let the desperate fool kill himself! And to-morrow you must take the gang and get me out a dozen packages of every class of the bogus cargo."

Vinton went out and posted Masterson as a guard over Schnorr with the two Russians. "You'll not be lonely," he said. And then he sent the Russian housewife in to cheer Madame Agathe. The beautiful dancer left Dimitri Nicolo, who was seated at the fire with his head dropped dejectedly on his bosom. "He will do all that you wish," said the dancer; "but, he stipulates that McGregor and Corvini shall both be paid up as agreed, and—not punished!

"Then you will have the voluntary evidence of the whole three." "I promise on my honor!" cried the delighted American. "Go now and ask him where the ship's papers are. I must secure them!"

The light-footed siren bounded back. "He gave them all to Ernest Schnorr, when the supercargo made him change the compasses and arrange to run the ship ashore on this island!"

"Ah! I shall interview the commercial gentleman in the morning!" said Vinton. "Now, Agathe, tell Nicolo to go down to the camp! I will surely make these fellows pay him the price agreed for this neat bit of landfall work! Let the whole three sailors make a clean breast of it, and I will keep my word!"

There was little sleep on the shores of the wave-washed bay where the castaways were camped, for the wind rose and the waters swelled!

In the early gray of the morning, Captain Zotoff had served out a meal to the able-bodied, and the energetic Masterson, with the whole available force, rigging a purchase, landed from out the bursted hatches a confused pile of merchandise, soon rolled high up on the beach and carefully covered with tarpaulins. When a dozen packages of every kind of the cargo had been recovered, in the presence of the three responsible witnesses, Howard Vinton examined the nature of the contents of the barrels and cases.

Gray-bearded old Captain Basileffsky, and Zotoff, too, made a long official "precis officiel" of the examined articles, sending the samples taken by themselves away for storage in the light-house magazine.

It was high noon before their work was done, and in the distance the black smoke of the two approaching steamers of the Volunteer Fleet could be seen to north and south.

"You had better now confine the three officers, Excellence!" suggested the Russian official. "They will then not be able to send any private messages, and you can now prepare your letters and dispatches! I will send a copy of this inspection document to our authorities in Stamboul and Odessa! What a superb fraud! Opium chests, filled with bricks—olive oil barrels with salt water, the valonia sacks with leaves and rotten acorns, the raisin and fig boxes with sweepings and rotten refuse, this whole cargo never cost a hundred pounds, besides the mere expense of handling and cases! *What a gang of robbers and scoundrels!*"

Howard Vinton eyed the stranded steamer now broken across in two shattered halves. "Yes! and this old rattle trap was insured for one hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds! A rich plum for Komanos and Company!" "We must hasten! The sea

is rising and it will take fully three hours to send off our helpless people!" cried the old Russian.

When Vinton had placed a sentinel over Nicolo, Corvini and the grumbling McGregor, he then addressed himself to his dispatches. The "Princess Olga" was lying off in the smooth waters of the lee of the island, and the "Tsaritza" hovered around a quarter of a mile away!

The rescued boats of the "Cornaro" conveyed the two drafts of departing voyagers, Zotoff commanding one flotilla, and the old Captain the other. There were warning whistles already sounding as Zotoff appeared with the Sergeant and Corporal told off as official dispatch bearers.

The gray sea was rapidly roughening and the wind rising into a shrill storm as the vessels steamed away to the northward and southward.

"You must try and be jolly with us for four days or perhaps six," said Captain Zotoff, standing beside the happy Vinton, who was now "monarch of all he surveyed." "It will take at least that time for Captain Drage to get over here from Taganrog, and to bring the representatives of the swindled insurers here from Odessa, with an officer to take charge of the whole situation!

"Better finish up all your work with these frightened rascals, and then, get the ship's papers from Schnorr before the Russian officer comes! We are slaves to red tape—then you have all in your hands, and you can flirt with Madame Agathe, or else study Russian with Basileffsky, till we are rescued!"

"Zotoff! You shall be a Major—if there is such a thing as promotion!" cried Vinton, as he proceeded to the room where Ernest Schnorr was confined.

He called Jack Masterson to his side as a witness.

"Schnorr," said Vinton, "I may as well unmask now! This ship, cargo and wreck are in the hands of the agents of Lloyds of London! I have all the proper authority to act! Your sly scheme is defeated! *The false cargo is discovered at last!* I have fifty tons

of it safe on shore! You may shorten your term of imprisonment somewhat by aiding justice now! Where are the ship's papers?"

"I threw them overboard!" stubbornly said the scoundrel. "I believe that you are lying! I know that you are!" cried Vinton. "Your accomplices have confessed, and now, I'll put you on bread and water till you speak! You may as well save a few years now!

"Watch him, Jack, till he gets sensible and sends for me!" said the irate Vinton. "Hold on! I have some private papers and valuables on the ship! Let me go alone on board! I will find the ship's papers, if you will let me remove my personal luggage! I hid several things, for my own reasons," cried Schnorr.

"Masterson! Take him on board!" said Vinton. "Let him go alone; and, if he first brings you the ship's papers, then let him go back and find his own things! I will have a talk with these other fellows! Mind you, I must have the papers first! Bring them at once, Jack, to me here! Let him rummage after that as he will over the ship! He can't get far away!" said Vinton with a ringing laugh. "Keep your eye on the shore, that's all," he added in a low voice. It was half an hour later, when Jack Masterson rushed breathlessly up the hill. "Here they are!" he said. "Let us go in and see if they are all really here!" said Vinton, throwing open the door of the room where the three officers were still sulking in confinement.

The documents were being examined one by one, when Agathe Mitis rushed into the room. "*The ship is on fire!*" she cried. Calling to the guard to control the three prisoners, Vinton, pistol in hand, raced down the bank, followed by Masterson.

There were dense volumes of smoke rolling out of the hatches and flames shooting out of the portholes of the broken wreck. "The crazy villain has fired the wreck!" yelled Jack. "Come back all!" he cried as

the dozen armed Russians crowded along in Howard Vinton's rear.

"There is some treachery!" he yelled, for Agathe Mitis was following them, her frantic gestures and screams telling of some hidden danger.

Masterson seized the reckless American, and dragged him back, as a deafening explosion sent flying debris raining down all around them.

The two fragments of the huge ship were blazing up with fiercely fed flames, as the fearless woman reached the affrighted spectators.

"Nicolo tried to save you all from danger! There was powder and naphtha stored in the cargo so as to destroy the wreck and all evidence of their villainy. They meant to fire it." "Where is the prisoner?" cried Howard Vinton, as he gazed at the blazing vessel." His proofs were vanishing now. Then Agathe the Serpent pointed silently to the flaming wreck. "Perhaps it was an accident!" she faltered.

That night, the wild, sudden storms of the Euxine lashed the shores of the rocky Island of Serpents. The whole party cowered in the shelter of the strong masonry houses, while the wind shrieked and moaned!

Three days later, the swollen and bloated corpse of Ernest Schnorr was flung ashore on the sands of the little bay, and the huge freighter had vanished. The wreckage covered the sea and shore far and near. When Vinton and Masterson gazed down on the dead man, they knew at last the whole story of the past, for Nicolo and his chums had confessed all. "Vale---Komanos and Company!" murmured the American, as they scooped a temporary grave in the sand. "*Now, for justice!*" he cried, turning away.

CHAPTER XV

THE SALVAGE CREW.—PROOF AT LAST!—TRAPPED AT TRIESTE.—DIMITRI NICOLO TURNS THE TABLES!—CASPARI'S FLIGHT.—TWO UNHAPPY PASHAS.—DIVIDING THE REWARD.—AN OFFICIAL CRUISE ON THE "CONQUEROR."

Howard Vinton found the time hang heavily upon his hands after the mutilated corpse of Ernest Schnorr had been committed to the sands of the little bay. Captain Zotoff and Jack Masterson governed the guard of fifteen armed Russians who had so effectually stormed the ship. Corvini and McGregor were now under simple surveillance, and Captain Dimitri Nicolo was left in the caressing hands of pretty Agathe Mitis!

The American had carefully refrained from putting any pressure upon the three responsible rogues. The terrors of the unknown future still hung over them, and they were as yet unaware whether the Governor-General of the Kherson provinces, the Turkish authorities at Stamboul, or the English ambassador would control their fate.

And they hastened to save themselves! Behind "his frowning Providence," Howard Vinton showed a smiling face, to the beautiful reprobate dancer! He well knew that he possessed a charm in all the secrets of her "midnight settlement" with the brutal Bouclair! The secret of the explosion was soon unraveled. It had been the intention of the two leading conspirators to adroitly fire the wreck after beaching the vessel, and so prevent any considerable salvage. To this end, cases of naphtha and a store of powder had been placed in certain convenient places in the "Alessandro Cornaro," known only to Captain Nicolo and to Ernest Schnorr.

Whether the scheming German was clumsily caught in his attempt to fire the wreck to destroy the main evidence, or desperately sought an escape in suicide from a long imprisonment, was a problem incapable of solution. "He faced a death by assassination if not torture," mused Howard Vinton, "for, the two Pashas at Stamboul and Smyrna would have done him to death, even if he should escape the revengeful bandits of 'Komanos and Company'."

The American a score of times traversed the narrow confines of the bare brown island, and discovered the remains of a score of vessels either driven ashore by the sudden storms of the Euxine, or sacrificed to the stupid imbecility of Turkish sailors—"the reckless slap dash ways of tramp captains"—or the easy-going "nitchevo" ways, of the Russians.

But his glow of excitement had all faded now—there was a far off "still small voice" in sunny South-sea calling him away, and he wondered if the "last act" would be cast at Constantinople or Odessa. "I shall let Captain Drage unravel the whole affair!" mused the ardent lover, for the "use of stationery" was impossible in these Robinson Crusoe days, and he yearned for news of Miss Lily Arnot's personal well being. Even a sight of the faded visage of Miss Lavinia Drage would have been a welcome gift of the gods! Zotoff had already established an interminable card game with Captain Basileffsky.

Agathe the Serpent was duly fascinating the old officer's innocent wife, and the three prisoners were communing over the "near future"—while Jack Masterson became highly popular with the Russian guard! He regaled them upon the "private stores" which had been plentifully supplied by Schnorr. It was easy to see that the locality of the casting away would have suited the purpose admirably had not the American smuggled his deck load of armed so-called "travelers" upon the "Cornaro." Fear alone, and the demand of the Russian Consul General, who held back the ship's clearance papers, had defeated Ernest Schnorr's care-

fully laid schemes, and the labor of years had come to naught!

Standing on watch, as mournful as Enoch Arden under his palm tree, Howard Vinton's heart leaped up as Zotoff at last came running with the good news: "There is a small steamer bearing down now with the Russian flag! Evidently a wrecking steamer! Take the glass!" It was indeed so! The American now played his last card quietly. He went down to the lighthouse station and brought Agathe Mitis to the knoll whence the approaching boat was plainly visible.

"My authority ends when that boat arrives! There will probably be a Russian officer, a wrecking party, some one to represent the insurance companies, and my secret friend, Captain Drage, of London. The only safety of the three prisoners is to refrain from any admissions to these foreign strangers. A full confession of all the past to Captain Drage alone, will be the only means of aiding their safety! Captain Zotoff will report back on duty to the Russian minister at Stamboul. I am no longer the actual commander of the Island of Serpents when the first boat lands."

"I will warn them, and it shall be as you wish!" cried the adventuress. "Will I, too, be a prisoner?"

"You will be free as air, and you can easily collect the payments due to your lover, Dimitri Nicolo, in Constantinople! Christakis and the two Dragomen of the Greek and Italian Consuls General can now force Schnorr's secret partner to pay! I wish them to suffer to every guinea that we can force out of them!"

Before the wrecking steamer cast its anchor off the bay, the American knew that he held the three suspects in his hand, trembling penitents. He was their only hope, now!

Howard Vinton modestly allowed Captains Basileffsky and Zotoff to receive the Russian functionary who stepped first out of the landing boat, and, then, attended by Jack Masterson, drew the delighted old Captain Drage aside. "Mum's the word!" gayly cried

Vinton. "Let the official party go up to the house with Captain Basileffsky! Zotoff will report all that goes on to us secretly! Who are the others?"

"The insurance adjusters and wreckers," said old "Shun Lee" Drage. "They fancied that there would be a great deal to recover! Where is the wreck, my boy?"

Then Masterson and Vinton led the old sailor down to the low mound where Ernest Schnorr had been laid away, rolled up in tarpaulins and canvas. "Here lies the man who blew up the wreck, and perished miserably with it!"

The storm had scattered the debris far and near over this lonely sea. "There is the battered and twisted bow of the 'Cornaro,' the main wreck, turned and slid back into deep water! Yonder are the stumps of the masts! Fire, storm, water and the explosion have neatly disposed of the great four-master!"

Together, they turned and climbed the mound where Captain Zotoff was ready to receive them.

"The smaller house is assigned to you and your own party, Captain Drage," said the young Russian. "And I have been detailed to look especially after your comfort! A preliminary examination will be held here to-morrow, and the crew of the steamer will at once load on all the visible evidences of the crime, and the samples of the rescued cargo. I will be your Russian interpreter! For to-morrow night we will sail for Odessa! You are free to confer with all the prisoners! Their future disposition will be determined at Odessa!"

"That's good, royal!" cried Drage. "Now, my boy, give me the whole story!"

An interesting triangular interview occupied the long afternoon while the energetic Russian official directed the rapid loading of the wrecking steamer.

Old "Shun Lee" Drage listened and gazed admiringly at Vinton, when Agathe Mitis had willingly given to Drage and Vinton the whole strange story of "Ko-

manos and Company" "You have left me nothing to do, my dear boy! You have earned my chief inspectorship for me, and you have secured the entire reward! What can I do for you, now?"

And Howard Vinton's cheeks were burning red as he hastily said: "We will settle our accounts,—in England. But I wish to say that, if you feel you owe me anything, then I wish Captain Nicolo and my faithful friend here, to be shielded and protected! There's only Masterson and I who can prove the alteration of the compasses! Nicolo was put in legal command at Constantinople!

"He and his wife," and here Agathe, the Serpent, modestly cast her eyes down, "are Greek subjects! Let them be taken to Stamboul, where you can first use and then, later, protect them! McGregor, a British subject, naturally goes into the hands of the British Ambassador at Stamboul, and Corvini is only an irresponsible sub-officer! He is accused of no crime!"

Captain Drage gazed frankly at Agathe Mitis. "Can I trust to you?" he said, gazing upon her with the dispassionate scrutiny of age.

"Dimitri and I leave our lives in the hands of this man! Let him answer for me!"

"Then, let Nicolo make a complete confession to the Russian authorities as to the deliberate casting away of the ship!"

"Nothing more?" said Drage.

"We will remove Ernest Schnorr's body for identification at Stamboul. These officials will declare the insurances all void!

"As for 'Komanos and Company,' the two cargoes at Smyrna will be shortly seized! All the Smyrna operations, the private history of Bouclair, the whole matter of 'Komanos and Company' will come up at Stamboul. I will handle McGregor, alone, and, I promise you and your husband Dimitri, freedom and protection! Go and tell Nicolo and Corvini, and let me know now that they understand!"

In half an hour, the secret compact was duly estab-

lished, and Zotoff, Vinton and Drage sat until the wee small hours in the arrangement of their own secret campaign.

It was sunset of the next day when the little steamer "Vladimir" bore away for Odessa.

Captain Basileffsky most enthusiastically slapped Howard Vinton on the shoulder and proclaimed him "Molodetz"—a bold and brave fellow!

The official party had carefully covered several reams of paper with those long-winded declarations, beloved of Russian officials. The old lighthouse keeper was unduly happy in the possession of Howard Vinton's gold watch as a keepsake, while his good wife wondered at the score of Turkish guineas which Agathe pressed upon her, as well as a stray jewel. Nicolo and Corvini were but nominal prisoners, while Jack Masterson was adroitly placed in charge of his old chum, Sandy McGregor.

The queer alliance of Enos Drage, Howard Vinton and Agathe Mitis was a victorious one! They stood at the stern of the vessel as Serpents' Island was lost in the mists of the night.

The beautiful dancer was growing singularly cheerful. Dimitri Nicolo had confided to her, alone, his possession of the three thousand pounds in good Bank of England notes.

It was a substantial nest egg for the future life of the Greek corsair captain and his wayward companion. By a peculiar lapse of memory, Nicolo had forgotten that a third of this windfall was duly the property of Corvini and McGregor. He refrained from divulging this particular fact to any one, as Mr. Ernest Schnorr had forgotten to impart the news in advance to McGregor and Corvini.

And so, Nicolo decided to remain a "trustee in trust" forever, as he sagely concluded that the white flag with the black circle and K, would never glitter again upon the dancing waves of the blue Aegean Sea!

There was some comment at the Hotel de Londres,

in Odessa, upon the singular beauty of Madame Agathe Mitis, who was jointly escorted to that splendid hostelry upon the boulevard overlooking the superb port, when the "Vladimir" steamed within the curving lines of the breakwaters.

"Shun Lee" Drage was soon the very busiest of men, while the relaxed Howard Vinton "rested from his labors." His first duties were to dispatch several portentous-looking sealed letters, addressed to "Miss Lily Arnot, St. Aubrey's Villa, Lenox Road, Southsea, England," and, to exhibit a reckless extravagance in a telegram similarly addressed!

The sentiments in the bulky letters were not original and it is true that the Lily of Southsea could easily divine them, but they lost nothing in repetition, and the historical portions so excited the "young person" a week later, that she alternately laughed and cried!

Judicious excerpts from them caused Miss Lavinia Drage to regret that Howard Vinton had not been born a Briton, and duly gathered into that "shining fold," Her Majesty's navy! But, the telegram which caused the Muscovite officials to wonder at such extravagance brought an immediate glow to "The Child's" heart, and caused her to indulge in pleasing surmises!

She answered it, with a corresponding extravagance, and was very careful to add "Letters to-day to Constantinople."

This pious task accomplished, Mr. Howard Vinton then called a carriage and returned, after some hours, with Madame Agathe Mitis, tastefully arrayed in a judiciously modulated richness, which caused the fair inmates of the Hotel de Londres, to assign Madame Mitis a place in the "exhibitionary professions," in which conclusion the keen-witted Russian dames were eminently correct! Captain Drage had already concentrated a detachment to sail on the morrow for Stamboul, including the three suspects, Captain Zotoff, the party from the Hotel de Londres, and a selection of the recovered cargo. Three of the Russian men-at-arms,

under the proud messenger corporal, were the whole escorting force.

While the American, now relieved from all "special duty with Lloyds," drove out to examine the great city on the brown bluffs of the Kherson plains, and later politely escorted his fair prisoner to the shades of a box at the opera, Captain Drage, with the British Consul, was busied till late at night closing up the local affairs with the authorities.

It was midnight when Howard Vinton returned from his social attentions to the dancing girl, now really the guest of Lloyds, and the delighted Drage received him with open arms.

"All is now in our own hands. I have had telegrams back from London, Smyrna, Stamboul and Trieste. We will just embargo the two cargoes of valuable goods sent there! Our Consul is all ready to seize them, and Van Lennep, too, is behind the two vessels with the 'Conqueror!'" The two Ambassadors and the underwriters call us to Stamboul! So,—all is well!

"By the way, the snake is only scotched, not killed! Still alive and wriggling, for Fitzgerald telegraphs me the news was sent on by wire to Smyrna from local friends of these bandits here and merchant Caspari cleared out in a half an hour. He quickly caught the passing Alexandria steamer, and is now safe in Egypt! But, we will walk into Halim Pasha and Rustem in fine shape! They shall feel the paw of the British Lion, I swear it!"

Howard Vinton was delighted to be relieved at last of the personal care of his insidious captive beauty, when the "Tsaritza" steamed out of the tranquil port and left great Odessa, with its polyglot mercantile bazaars shining out behind them.

For, Captain Dimitri Nicolo was allowed to resume the care of the lustrous-eyed dancer on the brief voyage of two days to Stamboul.

Zotoff, Drage and Vinton sat on the quarter deck

and swept the shores of Serpents' Island with their glasses as they steamed by on their southward path.

Only the great black and red prow of the "Alessandro Cornaro" remained to tell the story of the thwarted designs of the crafty schemer, whose body was en route to Stamboul, a mute but ghastly witness in the cancellation of the vast fraudulent insurances. One keen-eyed local underwriter was traveling in charge of the irrefragable evidences of the insurance swindle. while Jack Masterson tenderly nursed the four tell-tale compass boxes. It was an unanswerable indictment!

There was the British Legation launch anxiously awaiting them when the "Tsaritza" cast anchor under the shadows of the old Genoese round tower at Pera.

Chandos Grahame, the dilettante diplomat, lost something of his nonchalance when he grasped Vinton's hand. "You're a mad fellow, but a plucky and a lucky one!" he cried. "I brought your whole mail off to you and some papers also. The Smyrna and Stamboul journals are simply crowded with fairy stories about the last run of the 'Cornaro!'"

Howard Vinton thrust the beloved missives in his bosom and then, turned away to answer the soft appeal of Agathe Mitis' eyes. Christakis Nicolo with the timorous Dimitri were awaiting the all-powerful friend of the guilty beauty. There was a murmured conversation. "You will be taken charge of by your Consuls, both you and Cervini. Trust all to me, and, Agathe, let me find you at the Café Gréco!" With a burst of virtuous confidence, Christakis then unfolded the story of the unpaid drafts of Ernest Schnorr!

"You may as well force that Hebrew go-between of Schnorr's to pay them at once! If he does not, then threaten him with a public exposure to the Greek Consul! Face him up now, and make him pay for the proposed villainy."

And so, the fascinating dancer glided away with the overjoyed Christakis, after the last whispered advice of Howard Vinton. "You had better at once go to the Greek Consulate to-morrow, and be legally mar-

ried to Dimitri," smilingly said the young man. "*I can then, have your protection better arranged for!*"

This salutary hint was not lost upon the wayward waif of the Levant, who was herself, not averse to the measure of judicious reform. And that very evening a merry circle was gathered around the board where Chandos Grahame once more did the honors of the Legation mess.

"I do not see the use of my lingering here, now, Captain!" remarked Howard Vinton, when the inspector of Lloyds announced that Nicolo and Corvini would be paroled to the nominal custody of their Consuls.

"I need your own evidence, that of these two nautical men and the repentant McGregor to establish the permanent Black List of all the shippers of this cargo who assigned to 'Komanos and Company.' The moment that the proceedings are finished here, then you and I will take the flyer for Vienna, and run down to Trieste! The local agent of Lloyds here will finish up the cases, and then, our own Ambassador will have Halim Pasha and Rustem Pasha at once dismissed! The insurance cases will also be attended to by him personally. These fellows made real contracts for an outward cargo at Taganrog so as to strengthen their probable evidence as to the accidental loss of the ship!

"Those Russian merchants over there must be reimbursed from the proceeds of the Trieste cargoes. I will send my full instructions to Consul Fitzgerald tomorrow, which will serve to scatter the last lurking scoundrels of the 'Komanos and Company' band all over the Levant in an obscure hiding! You are not so very anxious to get right on to England, are you?"

And then, and there, Howard Vinton at last broke down. "You see you are working only for place and money! *I look for a different reward!*"

"Well! You can not be married till I am there—for —for various reasons!" said the stern old naval officer. "I will, however, make the stay as short as the interests of Lloyds will allow!"

"Well, if you can not make it particularly short, you may find me turn up *as a deserter!*" energetically said Howard Vinton, as he cordially said "good night!" "There is truly something the matter with that young man!" absently remarked Enos Drage, as he returned to the consideration of his papers and documents. "He is certainly laboring under a good deal of excitement!"

The bronzed veteran callously ignored the fact that far away in Southsea "The Child," and even Miss Lavinia, were also similarly affected with a sudden desire to arrange the preliminaries of an "interesting ceremony," in which Captain Drage was expected to appear in full uniform, and represent the family dignity of the "fighting Drages."

But, in this hour of supreme victory, old "Shun Lee" only thought of "the interest of Lloyds!" It was a case of "business before pleasure!"

"What is the program for to-day, Captain Enos?" demanded Howard Vinton, after he had gazed again with rapture upon the witching panorama of Constantinople, glowing in the morning sunlight. The morning coffee had been duly dispatched, and the old veteran looked up from a mass of papers. His green-lined sun umbrella and pith helmet were at hand ready for a sally upon the enemy.

"Conference at ten o'clock with the Russian and English ministers to decide upon the 'practical measures' to be adopted to pulverize 'Komanos and Company!' At two o'clock, meeting here with the insurance authorities, and reports of the Russian and English Consuls General with the Turkish Customs authorities as to the examination of the sealed samples of the false cargo! At four o'clock, the taking of your whole party's testimony here in presence of the Chancellor of the Russian Legation. When you, Captain Zotoff, the three culprits, and your remarkably dashing young woman friend, have recorded all their testimony, the compasses will be carefully deposited here as the last proofs and then, only, we are done! I have already

telegraphed to Higginbotham for authority to return to London!"

"*Southsea,* you mean!" broke out Howard Vinton. "No, London! I mean!" said the pleasantly smiling veteran. "For, Lavinia shall have my carte blanche to give the future Mrs. Howard Vinton a ship-shape send off! I have written to Lavinia to bring 'The Child' up to Morley's, and so to have all the running gear and top hamper ready on our return!"

Vinton was duly mollified and demanded meekly, "How can I help you?"

"Only by holding the three suspects and Jack Masterson, with your pretty friend—Mrs.—what's her name?—Nicolo, all ready to tell their whole story. I leave the entire thing here in the hands of our Ambassador and the local agent of Lloyds, who understands the case fully! The action of the British Ambassador will be to demand at once a reversal of Rustem Pasha's decision, the confiscation of the two Trieste cargoes, the payment of all the Russian claims for broken cargo contracts, and wholesale dismissals of the Smyrniote Customs officers, who knowingly issued the false papers for the first cargo on which the London fraudulent insurances were shamelessly obtained, and for issuing the three fraudulent clearances and manifests on which the two barks and the 'Cornaro' made their illegal criminal voyages!

"Of course, these unpaid insurances will be all declared void! After I have taken your evidence, Jack's and McGregor's, we will then pass Corvini over very lightly. He's only a sailor mate. But, from Nicolo and his wife, we want a full, clear confession in return for a guaranteed 'laissez passer,' as employes of the British Embassy.

"Nothing short of the clearing out of the whole nest of Smyrna land rats will satisfy me! We will black list all the fraudulent insurers on the first run!

"Then, my remaining duty is only to get over to Trieste, seize the barks, put our Lloyds agent there in charge of the case, and take care of Van Lennep's

future. You only go with me as a 'gentleman of leisure.'

"You have won me my heart's desire! My life's crown! And we will soon make these rascals feel that Lloyds' arm is a long one, and a strong one! Of course, the Trieste cargoes will have to go before an Admiralty Court, and we won't wait on that! You seem to be in such a dickens of a hurry now to get back to London!"

"*Southsea!*" quietly interpolated Vinton. "Captain, I propose to be married at Southsea. One word! You must never let Van Lennep touch the shore of Asia Minor again! *He is a dead man if he ever does!*"

"I have thought of that! He will be at once named as our permanent agent at Marseilles!" grimly said Drage. "There's just Dutchman enough in him to make him useful in watching the sly 'Monsieurs,' who are no fools, by the way! So, he will be saved from Robinson's fate! As for your crafty Greek and his pretty wife (Gad! what eyes that woman has!), they can now travel the whole Levant in safety, for, their evidence and attendance will be needed to the last!

"I will send them back to Smyrna under Consul Fitzgerald's public official protection, and have them ferret out the whole past history of these scoundrels! We will send a new Lloyds agent over to Smyrna and establish a new inspection code of all Levantine cargoes! No Turkish certificate will be the basis of marine insurance hereafter! Either a joint inspection, certified by a European Consul's seal, or they will get no Lloyds insurances.

"The other companies will, of course, follow this new rule for self-protection! It's a clean sweep, now, of the whole gang, far and near."

"I have only one favor to ask," said Vinton. "This young Russian Captain Zotoff is a man of men, brave, bright and energetic. Beg our Ambassador here to ask the Russian Ambassador to make him a major, and to throw in a medal or two!"

"I promise you that!" heartily said Drage, "for he

has prevented gigantic swindles, and saved many innocent lives! I feel like a brute when I think of you risking your life, my dear boy, from home alone with these assassins!"

"Oh! I'll get my pay, never fear, *at Southsea,*" laughed Vinton. "Just you look out for Zotoff, that's all!" The young American wandered down to the Café Gréco, under the escort of a Dragoman, and proudly guarded by the hilarious Jack Masterson.

When Vinton entered the café, there was an interested group in the rear of the long saloon gathered around Captain Dimitri Nicolo, and the genial Beberovich, whose superb steamer, the "Apollo" now swung at anchor lazily out in the blue bay.

Christakis Nicolo led Howard Vinton up to the boudoir above where Agathe Mitis waited, with glowing cheeks, to tell him the story of her legal union with the man whom the dead Bouclair would have made his catspaw and bond slave, holding the blood of the slain Bimbashi over him, as a continual menace of Turkish vengeance.

In a few words, the American explained the whole situation. "They are all ready—Nicolo, Corvini, the 'Big Inglese,'—and Captain Beberovich will take us safely down to Smyrna. I have obtained the legal papers from the Greek Consulate, so that the English Embassy can give us our 'laissez passer,' and so we will earn the Consul's confidence! Let the Dragoman come here at three o'clock, and the whole party will appear! The men have exchanged their whole histories of the past!"

"And you go away—to-morrow night?"

"Yes," said Howard Vinton. "I will never see Smyrna again! For, I have done with 'Komanos and Company' forever! And there is some one waiting for me, far away, in England, *waiting to be married!*"

The dark beauty's flashing eyes softened. "You must come and see me to-morrow before you go! I owe you—something!"

The sound of angry voices suddenly broke off their

tender conference, and Howard Vinton sprang down the stair. Captain Dimitri Nicolo was angrily facing the agent of the dead Schnorr, the go-between, who had effected the work of Halim Pasha and the fraudulent partner of Caspari and Rustem, the governor of Smyrna. Christakis Nicolo, with flashing eyes, drew Howard Vinton aside. "He swears he will not pay the drafts, there will be trouble!" the excited Greek babbled.

With a quick decision, Vinton realized the importance of placating the man on whose evidence the final defeat of 'Komanos and Company' now depended! He drew Dimitri Nicolo aside, saying, "You must pay McGregor and Corvini, out of these moneys! They must not go out empty handed to starve."

"I will! I will!" said Nicolo, "for this fellow has been the local agent of 'Komanos and Company' here!" Then, Vinton, in a low tone, whispered a few words. The Greek leaped forward and faced the defiant schemer.

"Hark you! My friend!" he said. "Here is a high secret official of the English Embassy. All is at last discovered! Your protectors, Halim Pasha, and Rustem, too, will be chased out of their palaces, and the British Ambassador goes at once to the Grand Vizier to demand the reversal of Rustem's decision! I am summoned there as a witness! I will denounce you there to-day, and, if these drafts are unpaid at three o'clock, you will be thrown into prison! It is my time now! The tables are turned!"

"It is false!" stammered the frightened broker. "I was only Schnorr's agent! He is dead!"

"Yes, but you, yourself, insured this very cargo for 'Komanos and Company,' and in your own name, and the moneys were secured upon the insurances! If you wish to shoulder the whole load of 'Komanos and Company' now, you can do so, but at your peril! Send now for the Dragoman of the Greek Consul General. Christakis!" cried the infuriated Nicolo. "I will denounce him here now, and have him at once arrested."

"Hold!" faltered the trembling scoundrel. "Bring the drafts! Bring them, Christakis, and you alone go with me. I will have them instantly paid." It was a "good bluff," and Vinton called up McGregor and Corvini!

When the café keeper returned in half an hour, Howard Vinton saw the last unpaid employes of 'Komanos and Company' thankfully receive their share! He laughed as he reflected that the two cargoes at Trieste would be also the means of paying off the sailors whom the Italian and Greek Consuls now harbored. "Settling day all round!" he said cheerfully, as Masterson and the Dragoman piloted him to a carriage.

When Chandos Grahame's dinner was concluded that evening, "Shun Lee" Drage quietly said: "Pack for our departure in the morning, my boy! Higginbotham telegraphs me to come to London via Trieste, at once. I shall take Jack Masterson and McGregor to Trieste, and send them around home in the 'Conqueror,' dropping Agent Van Lennep at Marseilles! So, if you care to telegraph to 'The Child' it will just save me a letter. I will spend the evening with the two Ambassadors. We will send the Nicolos and Corvini over to Smyrna to the British Consul on the 'Apollo.'

"This Captain Beberovich has also given us very valuable assistance! He has volunteered the story of Emile Bouclair, who was really a desperate escaped galley slave, named 'Sandeau le Forgéron'—once a bank employe, then thief, murderer, communard, and chevalier d'industrie! Prudence has kept this Austrian's lips sealed, but he will now aid Consul Fitzgerald in running the broken band to earth! He seems to be quite a friend of Nicolo's pretty wife!"

"I should say so!" dryly observed Howard Vinton, with glimpses of the past tete-a-tetes memory pictured. "*I should say so!* By the way, I will go down there to the marriage feast to-night!"

"Then, have McGregor and Jack Masterson at the railway station at eight o'clock! Better have that

sharp Greek café keeper warned to rouse them out! Give this to the men! I'll use McGregor in the future as a sort of Mediterranean policeman, but, he shall always drink his grog on the 'Conqueror.' There we are surer of him. He is too fine a professional scamp to be at the service of the Levantines! Besides, John Higginbotham wants him, in London now, to clear up some old matters."

It was long after midnight, and the silver stars were sparkling down on the dreamy splendor of the superb watery Paradise below, when Agathe Nicolo led Vinton out upon the overhanging balcony of the Café Gréco. The clash of glasses, the sound of laughter, the ringing of the passionate love songs of the Danube drifted out from the company led by the triumphantly elated Dimitri and the hearty Beberovich.

"I owe my life and his life to you," she whispered, with tear-gemmed lashes, as she fixed her splendid eyes full upon him!

"They would have trapped and killed you! I tried to warn you! For I knew that some one loved you, and so, watched over you as I watched over Nicolo! He is now free of the dreary slavery of crime!

"He shall buy the home we longed for there at Kastro, by the sea! We Greeks are only what Turkish rule has made us! And, yet, blood-stained as our lovely islands are, the rose and myrtle still grow there, out of the holy ashes of heroes! There is no sea as blue, no sky as fair as on the Aegean! Some day you may come back here! You will be a great man, rich and worthy!

"Do not forget Agathe, who owes her life to you! And—now—take this to her—to the one who waits! I can give it—for it was never mine! I bade Christakis to-day buy it for me!" She seized his hand and covered it with grateful kisses, and fled away.

The blue-eyed English girl wondered later when she saw the three silvery rows of perfect pearls, and Vinton clasped them round her neck.

"It is a gift from one whose wanderings would be the

story of the leaf in the storm!" was the only explanation he would give. The acute American had not failed to "save trouble" for his triumphant old Mentor by telegraphing to "The Child," and he roused himself next morn gayly with the lark.

Proudly conspicuous in his pith hat and green-lined white umbrella, Captain Enos Drage, R. N., cast his eagle eye about him, as the "Grand Oriental Express" was about to pull out of Stamboul, bearing the two triumphant agents of Lloyds on to Trieste.

The farewells had all been spoken at the Legation, and old "Shun Lee" knew now that the frightened Grand Vizier had acceded to all the British Ambassador's demands.

There was a convocation of "Greeks bearing gifts," at the train, and Enos Drage prudently turned away when a singularly beautiful woman threw her arms around Howard Vinton, and passionately embraced him, to the envy of the astounded bystanders!

"Just a little bit of emotion!" mused Enos. "It's the hottest blood in the world, out here in the land of the cypress and myrtle." Their compartment was royally furnished by Christakis, and the very last man to grasp Vinton's hand was the stout-hearted Zotoff.

"See here! My dear Excellence!" said he. "You made me a major in very short order. When my colonelcy is due, I shall certainly send for you to take another sail."

"Ah! You should see Russia!"

"Southsea is the only sea for me!" mused Vinton, as he watched the last flutter of Agathe Nicolo's handkerchief, as she stood swaying in the easy grace of her splendid beauty and waved her last parting greeting with all the enthusiasm of her tempestuous nature! A creature of fire and flame, borne on in light and shade!

Howard Vinton sighed, "I am an 'English Lord' on his travels no more! That silly trifle of accidental promotion may have been the foundation of my whole fortune!" But, his heart was boundlessly happy as he turned his face westward to where a certain welcome

awaited him upon the shores of the green billowed Solent!

"Land of Misery and Mystery! Good-bye!" he slowly said as the shores of the Golden Horn faded from view, and mosque and kiosk and penciled minaret all dropped down behind him, cypress hidden, in the fading east!

He watched the adroit Captain Drage now slyly disseeting the cranial treasures of old McGregor's memory at will, and also fraternally eyed happy Jack Masterson, who was now for the first time persuaded that the plumply-bodieed Mary Horton was really drifting in his direction, buoyed up on a sea of future happiness!

Vinton slept uneasily as the lightning train rushed along, and he was ever haunted in his fleeting dreams by the dark-robed form of a velvet-eyed woman whose sinuous symmetry gave a distinct eleganee to the funereal Turkish disguise. It was the figure of a panther-footed woman, with gleaming passionate love-distilling eyes, and in whose slender fingers were still clasped the two red roses, that Moslem emblem of a violent death!

So, Agathe, the Serpent, ruled in the shifting land of dreams! In a happy tranee of lover-like expeetancy, Vinton retraeed his road to Vienna, and silently watched the craggy Styrian Alps, as the voyagers sped on by Gratz, down to Trieste. His faee never lighted up until as they sped along the Riva Careiotti to the Hotel de la Ville, Enos Drage quiekly leaned forward and touched his arm! "There is the 'Conqueror,' sure enough, and the two barks out at anchor."

It was indeed the graeeful steamer of Lloyds' seeret navy, and, in half an hour, the whole party was eomfortably at home upon the deeks of the swan-like yacht. Howard Vinton was delighted to meet once more the volatile "Melloni," whose slashing wounds were now all healed! He reeled off the story of their own chase with a true Hibernian volubility. "We've got 'em sure

and fast, sir! The British Consul and Lloyds' agent are here already in charge!"

Melloni, the Dragoman, did the fraternal honors also, for Jack Masterson and that now well satisfied old pirate McGregor!

"My eyes! She's a beauty! a regular ocean rover, and—fit for a pirate king and his bride!" said the old chief engineer, who had not yet discovered, in his well filled up vinous enthusiasm, that he had been gently toled along as a merely self-delivered prisoner, into the hands of most attentive guardians!

They were all seated on the deck after dinner, when Drage drew Howard Vinton aside. "There's sixty thousand pounds of good merchandise in limbo here, and it will more than cover all the bills. The cargoes are really the fresh goods and they will be sold under a decree of the courts, and all the claims properly liquidated! I can give Van Lennep all his orders to-night! The final legal papers will be on from Stamboul in a week! The Consul here, with Lloyds' agent, will play to the keynote now set by the British ambassador at Constantinople. They will proceed to wind up 'Komanos and Company,' for good!

"We have made it cost the villains a good hundred thousand pounds, and my work is done at last. Van Lennep can quickly provision the 'Conqueror' and easily sail to-morrow night!

"You and I will just take the morning steamer for Venice, run along the Corniche Road to Marseilles, then, dash on by Paris to London!"

Immediately, Howard Vinton proceeded to take an astonishing interest. "You had better telegraph them now, to meet us at Morley's. For, thanks to you, my boy, we have routed the enemy, horse, foot and dragoons! There's no work left for us to do here!"

No lighter-hearted man than Howard Vinton ever crossed the Golfo di Trieste! He was amused to see the first gleams of genuine light-heartedness in the thoughtful-eyed Van Lennep. "I looked forward—or rather, backward," the German solemnly said, "to hav-

ing my throat promptly cut at Smyrna on my return! Ach! Marseilles is another thing! It has been a wonderful campaign! They will never make any headway again—those 'spitzbuben'!"

All the long way back to the shadow of St. Paul's, Captain Enos Drage was immersed in sundry calculations of a Draconian character, relating to the captured assets of the Smyrniote rascals!

But, when the train halted at Charing Cross Station, Mr. Howard Vinton was inwardly grateful for Captain Drage's conscientious attention to duty. "I will go at once down to the Royal Exchange and see Higginbotham! You had better go up and wait for me at Morley's!" The old veteran's grizzled head bobbed out of the window of the four-wheeler to say: "Don't wait breakfast for me! *I may be detained!*"

There is a certain sober drawing room of an unpretentious suite in the old London hostelry which took to itself the character of the garden of Paradise, when the eager American lover was aware of the entrance of "The Child!" It was not the quiet, self-possessed young person of the Southsea days, but someone who stood for a moment irresolute, transfigured there with softly shining eyes of a wonderful tenderness—and then, forgetting all "bashful maiden art," disappeared for a long interval, into the cavernous rest of her lover's arms!

Vinton had deliberately prepared a few words "eminently proper for such occasions," but the spasm of forgetfulness was a sudden one! And words were only vain and useless things to him then, for the fair head was resting on his bosom, and the heart of the woman he most loved on earth was now beating fondly against his own! They were dimly aware at last of the presence of Miss Lavinia, who just hovered for a moment upon the threshold, and then—good soul—"silently stole away" like the Arabs whom Mr. Longfellow so felicitously associates with vanished cares!

The attempt at lucid and connected conversation was wisely given up by both after several ineffectual

essays, as the emotional and interjectional element seemed to return with each new trial! The wisdom of Captain Enos Drage in remaining absent for some hours, and then making his solemn entry into the hotel, after the fashion of a Roman conqueror, was thoroughly approved by the heart-fluttered Miss Lavinia!

The Secret Committee of Lloyds escorted Captain Drage to his hotel with all due gravity, and they succeeded "in interviewing" Mr. Howard Vinton, though Miss Lily Arnot fled away, hiding her telltale blushes, and veiling her happy eyes in the impregnable solitude of her room!

John Higginbotham, with true British decorum, soon organized an impromptu meeting, of which he was the ex-officio chairman. The young American became greatly embarrassed when the head of the Secret Committee of Lloyds launched out into an unopposed panegyric upon the services which Vinton had rendered to "Lloyds" by the exile under the spell of Love! Howard Vinton found his own turn to blush when the vigorous old chairman announced the declared intention to call his "Committee" together, for the last time, to attend the wedding at Southsea!

The close of Higginbotham's oration was certainly a stunner! "As 'Lloyds' has unanimously confirmed by its Directors to-day, the Chief Inspectorship voted to Captain Enos Drage, I have been authorized to tender to you the position of deputy, at a salary of two thousand pounds per annum! Commerce has always its mysterious currents of hidden crime! British marine insurance interests are proportioned in their enormous risks to the vast preponderance of our carrying trade, always two-thirds of that of the entire world!

"The Suez Canal passes annually four times as many British ships as the fleets of all other nations combined! Roguery never sleeps, and villainy never languishes! And so, every combination to deceive and defraud in the handling of cargoes, both ashore and afloat, in the conduct of voyages and the casting away or destruction of vessels, every scheme that the human mind can devise in its iniquity may at any day confront those

interested in the enormous business of Lloyds! To be sure that we have gained you for all time, we now wish to make you one of Lloyds' right-hand men—as you will be chained to our own valued Chief Inspector by the golden links of the coming marriage bond!"

And then and there, Higginbotham sat down, fairly well pleased with himself. Member Waddingham modestly arose and heartily "concurred," adding the remark that he was requested by a friend to present a handsome service of plate to the young lady "who had detailed Mr. Howard Vinton" for "foreign service."

Captain Enos Drage was now visibly restless, and he fidgeted until Member Walden had briefly stated that a three months' cruise in the Mediterranean was designed as the first duty of the "Deputy Inspector," and that the "Conqueror" would be refitted at Portsmouth "to sail under the immediate orders of Mrs. Howard Vinton!"

The American was silent, while the words in which he would have expressed his thanks and grateful surprise trembled upon his quivering lips! But Enos Drage broke the spell as he brought his gnarled fist down on the table with a resounding thump. "I thank you, gentlemen, on behalf of the man who has bravely won your long delayed victory. And, I shall ask you now to make ready to drink the health of the bride—for Lloyds is a close corporation! *I will bring the lady in!*" Nothing could be denied to Captain Drage in his hour of supreme happiness, and soon the Secret Committee delivered themselves of impromptu advance congratulations, which brought again the fleeting blushes to the happy woman's cheeks, blushes as delicate as the play of the morning sunbeams upon the peaks of the Jungfrau.

Between the intervals of the dinner which welcomed the two wanderers home, Vinton managed to answer a few of the queries of Miss Lavinia! This undemonstrative dame had loyally created a high pedestal for the man who had stolen her lovely niece's heart, and

with a fond womanish hero worship, she was now wreathing the victor's brow!

It was remarked by the elders that the young lovers found little to say to each other. Whereat—with a sudden divination of the cause of the strange reticence—Captain Drage briskly led his maiden sister away to a secret session of the "Committee of Ways and Means"; and when they were left alone, in a more or less desultory fashion, the reunited lovers found means to exchange their experiences, with some casual interruptions of a delightfully emotional character!

"I shall leave it to you, Lily, to decide as to our wedding cruise. *I have shipped for life!* Shall we really go to the Mediterranean? Shall I follow up the pathway of future labors so strangely opened?"

"It would always insure Uncle Enos success in his secret service," "The Child" wisely whispered, "and, you will soon know how warm a welcome waits for you around the cheerful fireplace of the British Home! So, sir, as I am to command the 'Conqueror,' by the order of Lloyds, I invite you to be my guest!" "There's my hand upon it, and, *my heart too!*" joyously cried Howard Vinton, and, they "signed the articles" then and there!

Two weeks later, the delightful preparations for the happy wedding at St. Aubrey's villa, were punctuated with roars of an unfrequent hilarity from Captain Enos Drage, as the mails brought to him the veracious journals of Trieste, Constantinople and the hill-crested Smyrna. The telegraphed reports from Stamboul proved that the death of Bouclair and Schnorr had left the unlucky Pasha Governor, Rustem of Smyrna, directly liable for the false manifests, the mockery of a trial, and the subsequent official frauds and laches!

The downfall of Rustem dragged along with him his wary brother Halim; and the London trade journals held them both up as objects of "holy horror," as "unspeakable Turks" of deeply dyed malignity! And the wholesale official clearing out of the Augean stables of Smyrna made the social whirlpool to boil

like a pot! In the absence of the direct connection of the mysterious young Englishman of rank, the promoted Van Lennep was popularly considered to have worked the downfall of "Komanos and Company."

Howard Vinton, domiciled in state at the Royal Beach Mansion's Hotel, was the most dejected of men until the wave of excitement preceding the wedding had at last settled into the deadly calm of the night before the ceremony. The new gala uniform of Captain Enos Drage was a pleasure to his friends, and, very justly, a terror to the foe!

The old veteran made a last formal visit of a business nature to confer with his young partner in the victory so toilsomely achieved. "There is a little matter—the reward, you know, which Lloyds have so generously paid over for the destruction of the Smyrna nest of land and water rats. *One-half of it is yours!* I wish now to divide the reward!"

"See here, Commander!" earnestly cried Howard Vinton, "we are more than quits when you give me 'The Child,' as you call her, to-morrow! We will say nothing whatever about money!"

"Well, well!" musingly said Captain Drage. "You can't prevent me putting the half of it in the three per cents, and then giving it to Lily as a wedding present! God bless her dear heart! She will by and by have it all! And do you know, dear old Lavinia has 'a good bit of tin' laid away that'll go in the same direction! She's a far-seeing old girl!"

And then, the game old boy took the youngster's hand and said: "I owe the one crowning success of my life to you, my boy!" "Stop there!" gayly said Vinton. "You owe it to the darling child whom you and your sister took to your true hearts as a legacy of Love! For, the bread of Love cast on the waters of Life returns after many days!" And old "Shun Lee" smilingly assented!

When the very loveliest of brides came out of the pretty old English church on her husband's arm, Miss

Lavinia, proud and happy at heart, heaved one gentle sigh of regret.

"If he only wore Her Majesty's uniform!" The Secret Committee of Lloyds were the "cynosure of all eyes" at the remarkably jolly wedding breakfast, and the splendor of the votive service of silver was not eclipsed by any other offering of the extended circle of the friends of the Drages.

Lily Vinton and her husband were on their runaway honeymoon tour when Miss Lavinia began her preparations to anchor Jack Masterson for life, to buxom Mary Horton! She had confided her regrets about "Her Majesty's" uniform to Captain Drage, who easily divined the faded romance of his dear old sister's life! The true and unforgetting love of the brave old girl!

"Never mind the uniform, Lavinia! They are both in the service of the great commander, Love, now! They wear the royal colors of Happiness!"

THE END.

Gold Medals, Paris, 1878 : 1889.

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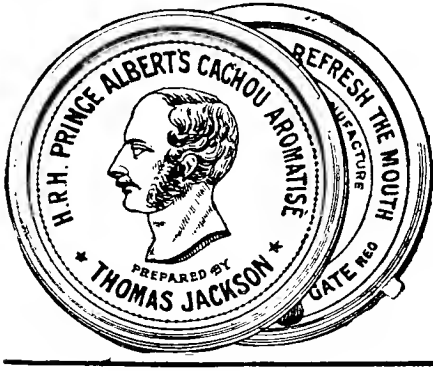

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